

PLUCK AND LUCK

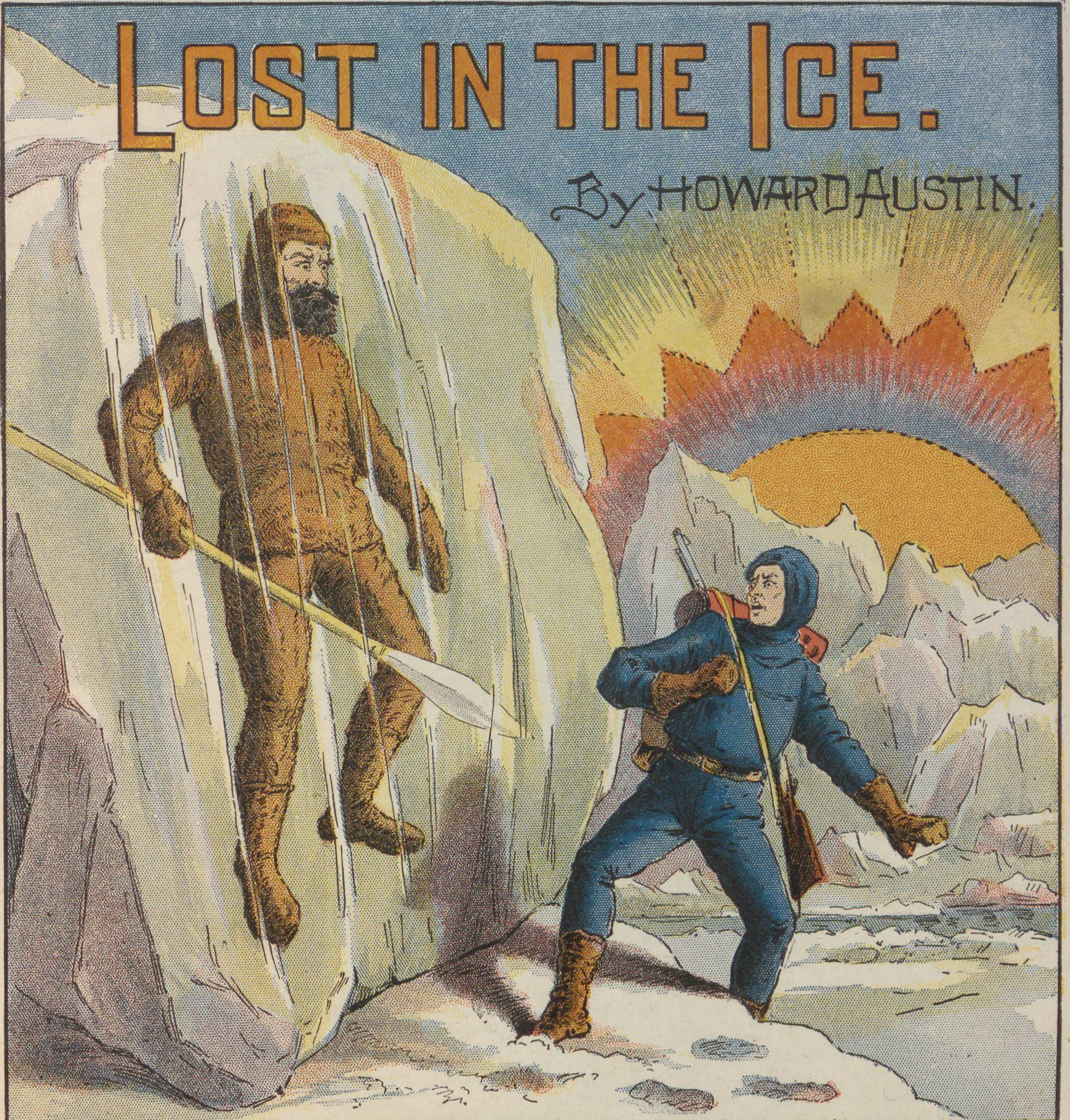
COMPLETE
STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, November 7, 1898, by Frank Tousey.

No. 160.

NEW YORK, JUNE 26, 1901.

Price 5 Cents.



In the centre of the block of ice, like a fly imprisoned in amber, frozen solid and immovable, was the figure of a man of gigantic proportions, dressed in furs and holding a formidable-looking spear in his right hand.

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LOST IN THE ICE.

By HOWARD AUSTIN.

CHAPTER I.

TWO VILLAINS—THE WHALER AND HER CREW.

"If you can find these papers or Saul Sloper it'll be wuth yer while to hunt for 'em."

"But the Ar'tic is a queer place to look for 'em, Mister Coddling, a very queer place."

"Not at all. Didn't Saul go to the Arctic?"

"Yes, and prob'bly stayed there, frozen solid or chewed up by the savages."

"'Cause why?"

"'Cause for he ain't come back."

"No reason at all. Folks do come back sometimes."

"Not when they've been away for five years."

"Well, if ye don't want to take the job, Bill Brackett, ye needn't, that's all; but I'd advise ye to. Second mates' billets don't hang on every bush."

"What'll you guarantee me if I get either the papers or Saul Sloper?"

"And get rid of Phil Gleason, too, mind. That part mustn't be forgot."

"Oh, that's easy enough done. I'd do that anyhow, Master Coddling, for the love I bears him," and the man laughed harshly.

"And fetch the proofs?"

"Ay, and fetch the proofs. That don't trouble me so much as why you want these yer papers. They must be wurth suthin'!"

"Well, don't I tell ye I'll make it wurth yer while to find 'em, or bring Saul Sloper back? He's got 'em or knows where they be."

"You want them 'ere papers bad, Tody Coddling, and I've got to be paid well fur fetchin' 'em or gettin' word on 'em," said Brackett, as he cast a knowing glance at the other.

"I'll pay yer when I sees 'em safe in my fist. Don't that suit?"

"No, it don't. Ye ain't said nothin' on what I'm going to git fur puttin' Phil out'n the way."

"I'll gin ye a hundred."

"Make it two, and I'll do it, but I must have half on it down. Hangin' matters cost dear, ye know."

"Oh, well, I ain't going to stick at that. I'll give ye a good outfit fur nothin', and pay ye t'other hundred when ye come back."

"I wants cash."

"But ye'll have to buy an outfit."

"Yes, but not of you. I'll go to old Hardner fust, and he's as bad a skin as you. I'll look arter my outfit myself. None o' your tissue paper blankets, rotten furs and leaky boots. I want things as is made to wear as well as to sell."

"My store is as good as—"

"Checks on a busted bank. Puttin' that aside, what'll ye gi' me fur gitting the papers?"

"Wait till I see 'em."

"But what'll ye give fur goin' arter 'em?"

"Another hundred."

"Don't flatter yerself, Mr. Toby. Them papers is wuth suthin' to you, and don't ye forget it. If you want 'em you've got to pay for 'em. S'pose Phil is dead, and you ain't got 'em, that's nothin'. You want the proofs o' his death, and the papers besides. Ye knows ye do, and ye can't deny it."

"Well, perhaps I do."

"There ain't no perhaps about it. You put down in black and white what you'll gi' me, or I won't touch the job at all."

"Will five hundred do ye?"

"Make it eight, which, wi' the t'other, 'll make a even thousand."

"Would you rob me?"

"Serve ye right if I did, ye old cormorant, for goodness knows ye've robbed other people enough to pay for it."

"Won't you take less?"

"Not a cent."

"Will ye fit out wi' me?"

"Providin' ye let me pick my own stuff. I can't trust you to do it."

"I will let you if you'll count it in the bill."

"All right, but it mustn't go over a hundred. Mind?"

"No, it won't. Then it's settled, is it? You're to kill Phil

Gleason and fetch me them papers or Saul Sloper, or find where they are, for a thousand dollars?"

"Correct."

"It's a bargain?"

"Yes; come out and have a drink on it to ratify the trade. I'll set 'em up myself."

The above conversation was held between one Toby Codding, as he was called, a general outfitter, shipping agent and commissioner, and Bill Brackett, a seaman, and the prospective second mate of the whaling bark Harpoon, about to sail from New Bedford to the Pacific and Arctic Oceans.

The scene was Toby's office, in his New Bedford store, and from the back windows one could see the wharves and the shipping, the Harpoon, which was nearly ready, being in plain sight.

Toby Codding, besides being the proprietor of an outfitting shop, did considerable law business of a rather doubtful nature, his clients being mostly sailors who had grievances against their captains, from whom they sought to obtain pecuniary damages.

Codding was said to have "cooked" the evidence in more cases than one, so as to make out a better case for his client, and then, finding that he could make more out of the other side, prosecuted his own man for perjury, or at least threatened to do so, and thus made a double fee.

Bill Brackett was a good whaler, but a bad customer to handle, being such a man as the rascally commissioner needed to do the unholy work he had just engaged him for.

Phil Gleason, the young man against whom the two were plotting, was a harpooner on the same vessel as Bill Brackett, and in the same boat as well, so that the scoundrel was right when he said that it would not be a difficult job to get rid of him.

Phil was twenty, well built and handsome, polite and courteous, strong and courageous, and a general favorite wherever he went.

He was alone in the world, so far as he knew, but had long supported himself on the proceeds of his whaling voyages, having been employed in that line ever since he was a boy of ten.

The present was to be a voyage of three or four years, the intention being to cruise for a season in the Pacific, and then having shipped their oil home from the Sandwich Islands, run up into the Arctic from the Pacific side and stay as long as the season lasted.

The Harpoon, Captain Hackett commanding, set sail from New Bedford three days after that on which the conversation just noted was held, and both Phil Gleason and Bill Brackett were among the crew.

Our story dealing entirely with the adventures of the crew in the Arctic regions, we shall skip over the first seven or eight months of her voyage, and take up the thread of our story from the time it reached the regions of perpetual ice and snow.

The Harpoon had made a good catch, and Captain Hackett was thinking of returning, the season being now well advanced and the danger of being caught by the pack ice too great to risk remaining any longer.

It was early afternoon and the men were gathered on deck, the man at the masthead, well wrapped up in furs, keeping a sharp lookout for whales, the helmsman having little to do, as the wind was fair and the vessel steering herself, as the saying goes.

Just in front of the try works was gathered a group of seamen sitting around upon upturned buckets and on the decks and bitts, listening to the veracious yarns of an old sea horse, Peter Peggs by name, the cooper of the vessel.

Large whaling ships, as my readers may not be aware, carry their oil casks not already hooped, but made up in bundles,

the staves having to be fitted and the hoops put on them as fast as they are needed, this plan saving considerable room in stowing the hold.

For this reason, a cooper, a blacksmith and a carpenter are always included in the crew, these persons, with the one or two extra hands that are always carried, together with the cook and steward, forming the ship keeper's crew when the boats are down, for, of course, the vessel cannot be utterly abandoned.

The Harpoon lowered four boats, which necessitated a crew of six to each, so that, all told, with the extra hands and all the petty officers, there were fully thirty-five souls on board—not a large number, by any means, for a vessel of the size of the Harpoon.

The cooper was called Peggs—not so much from his pegging away at his casks as from the fact that he was peg-toed, or, to speak plainly, had a wooden leg, the lower portion of his right limb having long since given place to a stick of timber, which could be screwed on and off, fitting into a socket which was secured upon the stump of leg which remained.

Peter Peggs was about as veracious as the renowned Baron Munchausen himself, and his tales were always listened to with the greatest interest, there being one thing that could be said to their credit, and that was that they were never calculated to deceive, being so remarkably imaginative that not even the most credulous person in existence would ever believe them.

"That reminds me," said Peggs, pointing his scraggy forefinger towards an iceberg in the distance, "of the time that Bill Perkins and myself were roaming around on the west coast of Africa, just under the Equator."

"You don't say?" remarked Diggs, the blacksmith, cutting a chunk out of the centre of a square plug of tobacco and inserting it into one corner of his huge jaw.

"It was so hot," continued Peggs, "that all the buttons on our trousers was melted, and the tar and grease just ran in a steady stream from our boots."

"It was so hot that our brains fairly sizzled, and the tobacco juice in our mouths was regularly boiling. The rubber in our shoulder braces all melted and run down our backs, and our gun barrels and knives was at a white heat."

"Why, it was so hot that, would you believe it, the leather on our belts just curled and shrunk up with the influence of it, and our tin cups expanded to that degree that you could put a quart of water, providing it didn't evaporate, into a half pint cup, and—"

Here Diggs, the blacksmith, was suddenly taken with a severe fit of coughing, growing black in the face, the big tears running down his scarred face, and every nerve shaking with his convulsions.

"He's got 'em again," said Stopps, the cook, leaping up and seizing the unfortunate fellow by the collar. "You didn't ought to tell such whoppers, Peggs."

Then he struck Diggs a tremendous blow on the back of the neck, the man gave a few gasps, and then recovered from his choking fit, saying reproachfully, as he swabbed off his glowing face:

"I've swallowed another quid, and that makes six to-day. If you will tell such awful lies you'll have to find me in tobacco."

All hands laughed at this; and we may explain in passing that Diggs had a habit of opening his mouth very wide when Peggs got upon one of his tough yarns, and that the utter astonishment which they caused him made him forget everything, until he was suddenly recalled to himself, and that he was in danger of choking.

After this little incident, Diggs having been happily restored, and having loaded up again, his plug now presenting the appearance of a square block with a hole in the middle, from

his habit of cutting out the center, Peggs was about to continue the narration of his extraordinary adventures in Africa, when the man at the masthead suddenly sang out:

"Something ahead of us, sir!"

"Look like a whale?" roared the skipper.

"No; 'pears to me like a floating hulk with people on it."

"Clap on more sail, boys, and luff her a bit. This sea is not the best place for a man to be wrecked in, and we'll go to the rescue of these people at once."

CHAPTER II.

THE CASTAWAYS—MOLLIE—THE ICEBERG.

It was not long before the Harpoon came near enough to the object which the lookout had discovered to enable the men on deck to see just what it was.

It proved to be a dismantled hulk, nearly water-logged, and fast going to pieces from the many collisions it had with the floating ice, a bowsprit being broken short off, the rudder badly damaged, and the decks fallen away in many places from the ice which had been heaped upon them.

Standing upon the deck and gazing over the rail, amidships, were three men and a youth girl, scarcely nineteen years of age, remarkably pretty, and looking very strange in that wild region.

"What vessel is that?" asked the captain, when the two were within hailing distance.

"The Wanderer, of Boston. Will you send us a boat? We have none."

"She is a wanderer, sure enough," remarked Phil, "and in a desolate region enough. How comes this young creature on board, I wonder?"

"When were you wrecked?" asked the captain of the spokesman, the oldest of the little party of castaways.

"Two weeks ago, and we have floated about ever since. The captain, officers and nearly all the seamen were lost at that time."

"Where was it?"

"Much further south, but the currents have drifted us up here into the ice. We have suffered badly, and could not have held out much longer if you had not come upon us."

"Lower a boat, Mr. Finch," said Captain Hackett to one of his officers, "and take whoever you like."

This meant that anybody who wished might go in the boat, and volunteers were ready in a moment, the rule of "first come, first served" being in force as a consequence.

Phil pulled the harpooner's oar, Diggs the stroke, one of the starboard boat's crew the midship oar, and Charlie Mercer, a young seaman in Phil's own boat, the bow oar, Mr. Finch sitting in the stern sheets and steering.

Charlie and Phil occupied the seats they always did when in the boats, and as the business on hand was not as serious as whale catching they had plenty of opportunity to indulge in conversation, being great chums, although Phil was an officer and Charlie only a seaman.

A short pull brought the boat alongside the old hulk, and the wanderers were taken aboard, the one who had spoken assisting the young lady and paying her every attention.

"Be careful, Mollie," said he, "for it would be hard to lose you after all that I have suffered."

"You shall not lose me, father," said the young girl, in the pleasantest tones, "and our troubles are nearly over now."

Poor child, had she known the hardships and privations that were to follow, she might not have spoken so cheerfully.

"Is this your daughter, sir?" asked Phil, assisting the maiden into the boat, which danced up and down in the liveliest manner.

"Yes, and as she is all that is left to me, you can understand my anxiety. You look to be a noble young fellow, though, and I can trust her with you. How are you called?"

Philip Gleason is my name, but they always call me Phil. I am a boat-steerer aboard the Harpoon, and belong in New Bedford."

"My name is Maynard, from Boston. Mollie, this is Phil Gleason, whom I trust you will like, seeing that we shall be in his company for some little time yet."

"I am glad to see you, Phil," said the girl. "You and I must be good friends."

"I hope so, indeed, Miss Maynard," said Phil, as she took a seat near him.

"You mustn't call me Miss Maynard, then," she answered, with a sweet smile, "for my friends call me Mollie."

"Then, Mollie, I trust we shall be good friends now and always."

"Have you got anything aboard that you want?" asked the mate, when the three men had all entered the boat.

"No," answered Maynard. "We loaded a boat the other day with the things we wanted most, and had scarcely got it afloat, being about to follow those who had already got in, when a huge mass of ice fell upon it, and carried boat, men and all to the bottom."

"We hadn't much to make a fire with," interposed one of the seamen, "and we most froze to death since coming up here; that's what did happen to half a dozen of us. We couldn't leave the vessel, 'cause we hadn't no boats, and so there we was."

"She's settling!" suddenly cried the third man. "Look out, or you'll be swamped!"

"Pull hearty, my boys!" shouted the mate, and the crew bent to their oars with a will.

None too soon, either, for they had gone but half a dozen boats' lengths from the miserable hulk ere she gave a plunge and sank from sight, making a great splashing, and setting the water to whirling and boiling all around.

The boat was luckily beyond the influence of the suction, and in a few minutes it was alongside the Harpoon. The crew scrambled up, drew the boat after them, and the castaways were again safe aboard ship.

That evening the fore-castle congregation was again gathered around the try-works, upon the hearth of which sat Peggs, his right hand grasping his wooden leg, his hat shoved back on his head, and his story-mill going at full speed.

Diggs had finished cutting out one plug, and having well rounded the circle in the center and cut off the outside corners, had put it aside, and was now engaged in digging out a new one, and stowing away an enormous quid in his huge mouth.

"I never saw such a mouth as you have got," said Peggs, pausing in his narrative when Diggs began to load up. "Why, I believe it's large enough for you to whisper in your own ear without any trouble."

There was a laugh at this, and then Peggs went on with his story, branching off upon an entirely new subject, which was a habit he had when interrupted in his yarn spinning.

"That reminds me," he began, "seeing these poor wretched fellows makes me think of the time when I got smashed up in a railway accident. I tell you the way things were knocked about that day was something awful."

"First the smoke stack got jammed against the top of the bridge, and you couldn't tell one from t'other, so that the brakemen on top walked into the stack instead of going over the bridge."

"The cow catcher was busted into ten penny nails, and the cars were so jammed together that a man couldn't for the life of him tell whether he was in the front, rear or middle, and ten in a seat was nothing."

"Why, things was so mixed up in that train that Bill Perkins actually kissed a gal that he'd never seen by mistake, and a fellow that I owed five dollars took me for another man and made me give him ten; and I, taking him for a fellow what I owed twenty, thought I was gettin' off deuced cheap until I got straightened out again."

Symptoms of strangulation appearing in the worthy Diggs, the narrator suddenly paused in his story-telling, and quickly unscrewing his annexed ankle, leaped to his foot as we must say, and hopped rapidly toward the unfortunate Diggs.

Seizing him by the collar, he brought that wooden leg of his across the man's back, and then across that portion of his anatomy which receives the most wear and tear when sitting down, and beat a lively tattoo upon it for the space of two minutes.

At the end of that time Diggs suddenly gasped, coughed, and spat out his chew of tobacco, which he had swallowed as usual.

He made a grab for it, but it eluded his grasp, and whizzing over the top of the rail, fell into the sea with a dull splash, while its former owner exclaimed:

"There goes another chew, and that makes six to-night. If you had to pay for my tobacco, Peter Peggs, you wouldn't tell such awful lies."

"How confoundedly cold it has grown in the last few minutes," said Phil, who had been standing by the rail listening, with Mollie by his side. "Don't you feel it?"

"Not with this big fur coat around me," she answered, with a merry laugh.

"Better increase the lookout forward, Phil," called out the captain at this moment; "I don't want to run into an iceberg."

"Ay, ay, sir; put another man on the lookout, then," cried the young fellow.

This incident put a stop to any more yarns for a time, as the men at once crowded to the rail to see if they could discover any of those huge masses of ice, the near presence of which Captain Hackett so greatly feared.

Peggs had screwed on his leg again, and was now stumping around the deck in a state of great excitement, planting his timber toes upon his mates' fleshy ones in a manner that made them use a good deal of strong if not polite language.

"Confound your stupid pegs. Why don't you step on the deck and not all over a fellow's feet," roared Stopps. "You are as clumsy as an elephant."

"Shut up, old slush-bucket," answered Peggs, stumping along and planting his wooden extremity on the pet corn of the irate blacksmith.

"Ow! you dod-rotted, clumsy, wooden-headed cuss!" yelled Diggs. "Why in thunder don't you look out where you are treading?"

"Oh, you go along, and make a chain of your old plugs to hang around your neck," answered Peggs, plodding along toward the rail.

The pig which occupied a pen upon deck having been aroused by the excitement, and finding his snug retreat intruded upon by the boisterous sailors, made a rush across the deck at this moment, and happening to run directly between the cooper's legs, threw that individual flat upon his back.

In an instant, however, the irate Peggs had unscrewed his leg, and sent it flying after that excited porker, taking him in the stern sheets, and causing him to set up a most unmelodious squeal.

"Pick me up; give me my leg; set me on my pins, somebody," yelled Peggs, but the seamen were all so busy that no one attended to him, and he was obliged to leap across the deck upon his one good foot until he reached his wooden leg, which piggy was rolling over and over on the deck.

"Get out o' there ye proscribed beast!" cried Peggs, making

a dash at his wandering leg, and cracking the pig over the head with it.

Then restoring it to its place, he stumped back to where he had met with his fist misadventure, but by this time the excitement had passed, and there was no occasion to crowd any one away to get at the rail, so that the desire to get a good place departed.

That night, during the middle watch, Phil was startled by the cry of the officer on deck and rushed out to see what was the matter.

The air was bitterly cold, and right in front of the vessel there suddenly emerged from the inky blackness of the night a white and glittering mass, which towered to an immense height above the vessel.

"An iceberg!" shouted the men, and then, before the startled helmsman could obey his hastily-given orders, and evade a catastrophe:

Crash!

The ship reeled from stem to stem, and shuddered like a thing of life.

Crash!

Crash!

There was a loud report, and then, with the speed and force of an avalanche, an enormous mass of ice, weighing many tons, fell upon the bow of the vessel.

It broke into many fragments, which rolled from the deck into the sea, but the imperiled vessel, leaping forward under the shock, as if to escape utter annihilation, was in a moment tightly wedged in between two divisions of the iceberg it had crashed against, and, being lifted bodily from the water, keeled over partly upon one side and settled down in the groove so strangely formed for it.

Like two ponderous jaws, the two masses of ice came together and locked themselves fast, crushing in the ribs of the ship, strongly built though she was, as though they had been of paper.

There was no danger of her sinking, however, although the water filled the lower hold, for the ice had quickly come together under her keel, leaving her poised upon the iceberg with the glittering masses towering high above her upon all sides.

All this had happened in the shortest possible time, so that before the crew were well aware of what had occurred, their ship was a wreck, the freezing mountain had closed about them, and they were lost in the ice.

CHAPTER III.

THE EXPEDITION—PHIL'S DISCOVERY.

"Fortune favors me, for now that we are imprisoned here, there is a chance that I may run across Sol Sloper, if he still be alive, and from him learn of the precious papers that old Toby is so anxious to get his dirty hands on."

Thus said Bill Brackett to himself, a day or so after the catastrophe to the Harpoon, and a glance at the surroundings of the unfortunate crew will show the force of his words.

At the time of the crash at least half a dozen of those on board had been killed by the falling ice, and among this number were the two men who, with Mr. Maynard, had been rescued from the Wanderer.

The Harpoon happening to settle again during the night, two or three others were killed by pieces of ice falling upon them, or from slipping from the wreck into the crevices, where they were quickly crushed to death before aid could reach them.

In the morning the vessel was found to be firmly embedded

in the ice, the water having frozen solidly around her keel during the night, so that she was fast locked in her cold bed, with no chance of her ever being set free.

The weather had changed greatly within four or five hours and when daylight came the anxious watchers could see nothing but one trackless waste of ice and snow as far as the eye could reach.

When the accident had happened they were considerably to the east of Wrangle Island, at that time thought to be a portion of the main land, but since then they had drifted still further eastward, so that, provided they succeeded in making any land at all, it would be upon the North American coast.

The vessel, as we have said, was greatly crushed by the ice, and it happened that when she partially broke up the after part was greatly damaged, that portion containing the captain's and officer's rooms being carried away.

The result was that all the nautical instruments, charts, and chronometers were lost, and the crew had no means of ascertaining their position from time to time, being as helpless in that regard as so many ignorant savages.

Quarters were provided in the hold amidships, stoves being set up, and the adventurers made as comfortable as possible, there being apparently little chance of their getting away before spring, if they did so then.

The vessel having been fitted out for the Arctic fisheries, there were many things among the stores that would not be found in other vessels, as every one knows who understands anything about the matter.

Among the supplies, therefore, and included in each man's outfit, were fur garments, heavy, extra warm underclothing, boots of sealskin, and many other things absolutely necessary in a cold climate, including certain kinds of food of no use anywhere else.

The crew was, therefore, well provided for, and from the extras occasioned by the loss of a part of the number, Maynard and his daughter were supplied with what they needed.

Mollie was an adept at her needle, and, with a few lessons from Phil, soon acquired great skill in the use of the palm and sail-needle, so that she quickly made herself a full set of fur clothes, which were absolutely indispensable, as without them she would have perished with cold in a short time.

October came and found the wanderers comfortable, the snow having drifted deep over their strange abode, which they had protected and screened from the wind in a great measure, by tacking sail cloth along the sides, particularly where the boards were broken away.

The necessity of fuel was a pressing one, but there were many parts of the ship which could be used for firewood, and there was plenty of oil which could be sacrificed in case of need, so that there was no immediate danger of freezing, though care would have to be taken of what they had.

They could not always remain upon the ice, however, and Captain Hackett decided that it would be best to send out an exploring party in search of land, or natives who could guide them thither.

Should this end be accomplished, it was his intention to move the whole party from their present quarters, and thus, when the spring came, there would be more chance of their escaping safely and ultimately making their homes.

The captain himself headed the party, accompanied by his first mate Mr. Maynard, the carpenter and two seamen, Phil being left behind, although he very much desired to go.

The party promised to return in four days, but when twice that period had elapsed they had not done so, and those who had remained in the ship began to be very much concerned about them.

A week more passed away, and in this time Phil and Charlie,

accompanied by three or four companions, had been out upon several expeditions in search of them, and during one of these had come upon a number of dead bodies, which they had no doubt were those of some of their friends, although they were so mutilated as to be past recognition.

"My poor father is lost," cried Mollie, one day shortly after the last expedition had returned. "I will never see him again. Who will protect me now?"

"I will," answered Phil.

"And so will I," added Charlie, "though perhaps not in the same way as Phil means. You will let me be a bother to you?"

"With all my heart. I am glad to have found such friends as you and Phil."

Our hero held a consultation with the crew, Peggs being a good counselor despite his many odd ways, and it was decided that, although the captain and his companions had undoubtedly perished, it was best to endeavor to find a better retreat than the wreck afforded them, and that another party should be sent out at once.

"We are lost in the ice, and will perish miserably if we do not find land," urged Phil. "I advise the sending out of another party, and will head it myself if no one volunteers."

"I don't see any use in it," said Bill Brackett, "and I should advise you to wait till the ice breaks up. We'll have our boots then, and can get away a mighty sight easier'n we kin now. You may do as you like, of course, 'cause nobody's captain now, but I'm going to stick by the ship."

"Better draw lots!" said Diggs, completing the ring that he had dug out of his plug, and filling his mouth with the clippings.

"Not a bit," retorted Brackett. "Some won't want to go and some will. So it'll be an easy enough matter to settle who shall make the party."

"How many will go?" asked Phil, and about half the number signified their readiness by rising.

Phil picked out about two-thirds of these, and Peggs, finding himself among the rejected, made a great ado, making such a fuss that Phil consented to his going, though there was a great laugh at the idea of a wooden-legged man stumping around in the ice and snow.

"That's all right," grunted the irate cooper; "but I'm as good, if not better than some on ye that wasn't willin' to go. If I are got a wooden leg, my heart's flesh and blood and not a stun', like some on ye; and that reminds me—"

"Then we'll get ready and start as soon as possible," interrupted Phil; "the sooner the better."

Then taking Charlie to one side, the boy having volunteered, he said gravely:

"You must stay behind, Charlie, and look after Mollie. I fear treachery among some of those who remain, and I shall need you in the ship more than on the ice."

"If you say so, Phil, I'll stay, but it's a great disappointment."

"You can do me more good by staying than by going."

"Then count Charlie Mercer among the stay-behinds," said the other, "for I know that you would take me with you fast enough if you thought I could help you better. Whatever you decide upon I shall stand by, and do my best wherever I am."

"I know that, Charlie, and that is why I preferred to leave you. I want as many as possible that I can trust to stay in the ship."

The party set out the next day, and consisted of Phil, Peggs, Diggs, three sailors named Block, Hudson and Andrews, Stopps, the cook, the steward, a short, sturdy Hollander, called Van Dam, being left behind to cook for the others, and two or three extra landmen or green hands.

Each man carried a pack on his back, containing the things he would most need, while some took axes, some rifles, and one or two harpoons, Phil being one of the number.

"Good-bye!" called out Charlie, as the party set out across the ice, the leaden sky hanging over their heads, and nothing but a dreary waste of snow and ice surrounding them.

"Come back safe," said Mollie, throwing Phil a kiss, "and don't stay away longer than is necessary."

"It'd be a good thing if he never came back," growled Bill Brackett, standing apart from the rest. "Now that they've gone, I must look for Saul, for I reckon this is pretty near the right place to find him if he ain't dead. Confound them papers! I reckon they are at home in New Bedford all this time, and Toby just wants to git rid of me, so's I can't tell something that I know about him."

Meanwhile, the party had made good progress, and were presently hidden behind a mass of snow, which prevented them from being seen.

They had a small boat compass with them, and Charlie had hoisted a red flag upon the stump of a mainmast, so that they would have something to guide them in striking out their course in returning.

For several hours they plodded on, taking a southerly direction, and following the easiest path they could find, there being an occasional trail where the ice hummocks were so thick and impassible as to necessitate a considerable detour.

They rested awhile at noon to take some refreshment, and then started out again, Phil being somewhat in advance of the others.

After awhile it began to snow, gently at first, and then quite violently, and Phil was about to retrace his steps and rejoin his companions so as not to lose them, when he was suddenly arrested by seeing a most singular-looking object just ahead of him.

As he made his way around the top of a snowy hillock, he saw a huge block of clear, transparent ice, some twelve feet square and nearly as thick, standing, slightly inclined, against a mass of what might be rocks, but which was entirely covered with snow.

In the center of the block of ice, like a fly imprisoned in amber frozen solid and utterly immovable, was the figure of a man of gigantic proportions, dressed in furs and holding a formidable-looking spear in his right hand.

The features were well preserved, and were savage and ferocious to the last degree; the staring, blood-shot eyes, the set jaws and glistening teeth, the heavy black beard and shaggy eyebrows, giving the whole face an appearance calculated to make even a brave man tremble.

In height the figure was over six feet and broad in proportion, the limbs, although clothed in fur, being evidently of immense size.

Phil knew that the inhabitants of the Arctic regions were short, squat, dumpling-like fellows, and his wonder can easily be imagined at seeing this evident relic of bygone ages, for that the figure was of ancient origin he could not doubt.

The snow began to fall thick and fast now, and not wishing his friends to lose this strange sight, he turned and beckoned to them, they in turn hastening their steps through fear that their leader had encountered some enemy.

CHAPTER IV.

PHIL MEETS WITH A SECOND SURPRISE.

"What's up?" asked Peggs, as he came stumping up, being the first to reach the spot where Phil was standing.

"Look there, and tell me what you think," answered Phil, pointing to the savage-looking figure frozen in the block of ice.

"Well, I'll be blowed!" ejaculated the astonished fellow; "if that don't remind me——"

At that moment Diggs came up, and was so surprised at what he saw that he instantly swallowed his quid, and had to be thumped across the back very soundly with Peggs' wooden leg—unattached, however—before he could recover himself and say:

"Well, if that don't beat me! I did think that nuthin' could choke me short of one of your lies, Peter, but I'll be blessed if this don't cap the deck. If I'd heard you tell about it without seeing it, you'd 've had to plant me beneath the glistening ice, bless me if you wouldn't, fur I shouldn't have survived it."

"But this is true," said Phil.

"That's what makes it so wonderful. Why, if Peter should drop into the truth occasionally in telling his yarns I shouldn't be able to stand 'em as well as I do."

"What's the matter?" asked Stopps, who was smoking a short, black pipe, to which he was as much devoted as Diggs to his plug. "One would think you'd seen something to frighten you."

"Look at it," answered Peggs, stepping aside so that the cook could get a good look at the terrible figure.

It was now snowing quite fast, and for a moment Stopps thought that the strange creature in front of him was alive and about to spring upon him.

Leaping back fully six feet, he uttered a yell that would have done credit to a Comanche Indian, and brandishing his ax, roared out:

"Don't let him come any nearer or I'll make hash of him. Keep him away, or I can't say what I might do to him. Oh, the brute!"

The whole party had come up by this time, and their wonder knew no bounds, the size and evident ferocity of the unknown creature imbedded in the ice excited their utmost surprise.

"The fellow must have belonged to a race long since extinct," said Phil, "for none of the present inhabitants of the Arctic regions are anything near as big as this."

"No, they are all short, stump little vermin," added Diggs; "none of them being over five feet, while this fellow is seven feet if he is an inch."

"That reminds me," began Peggs, who had been stumping around, and then he suddenly stopped.

At the same time he dropped upon one knee, his left leg suddenly disappearing right into the snow, throwing him completely off his balance.

"Ow, ow! Pull me out—put me on my legs again, somebody!" he shouted, trying to free himself, but only sticking all the faster.

"Old Peg-toes has run his wooden foot into a crack!" laughed Stopps, "and has got caught. If we leave him there he'll sprout in the springtime. How green he will look."

"Not half as green as you, you squint-eyed slush-bucket!" yelled the irascible Peggs. "If you lived in the country the cows would mistake you for grass."

"I ain't squint-eyed!" retorted Stopps, indignantly, there being a slight cast in his eyes, at any mention of which he always grew very angry.

"I say you are!" snapped Peggs, tugging away at his imprisoned member, and falling upon his nose in consequence. "I say you are, and I kin prove it. If a fellow steered north by the way you were looking he'd strike a southeast. You're so cross-eyed that if you was to cry the tears would run down your back."

There was such a general laugh at this quaint remark that even Stopps was obliged to join in the mirth, and then, wishing to get even with Peggs, he said:

"Why don't you unscrew your peg, you old fool? You're ready enough to do it at other times."

"Unscrew it!" yelled Peggs, growing black in the face, "and me stuck fast here in this ice! Do you think I'm a top to spin around on a peg? Come and pull me out, you wall-eyed idiot, and stop asking foolish questions."

Phil, who had laughed until the tears came at the ridiculous position of the angry cooper, now came to the latter's aid, and, with the assistance of Block and Hudson, soon succeeded in setting the man upon his pins, somewhat ruffled in temper, but none the worse for wear.

"We can't stay here," said Phil, "for the snow will soon blot out our road completely, and, besides that, it is growing much colder. We must find shelter somewhere."

"Shelter? In this here howling wilderness?" spoke up Diggs. "You might as well look for a gold eagle in a contribution box."

"That reminds me of the time when me and Bill Perkins got lost in the Arabian Desert with three thousand dollars in cash—hard cash, too, it was—full weight, with no chunks bit out, or holes punched into it, so's you could hang it around the baby's neck, and spend it when you got hard up for a drink. We was tramping along through that hot desert, as I was telling you, when——"

"I've found a place where we can hide!" called out one of the sailors at that moment. "It's a regular cave built into the ice."

All hands made a rush forward, Stopps saying to Peggs, as the latter began to look disgusted:

"Save it till next time, Peter. There's an icicle a foot long on the end of your nose now, and a snow bank two feet deep on top of your head. If you don't get in out of the storm you'll freeze your wooden leg."

The shelter which the seaman had found proved to be an ice hut, such as the Esquimaux build, but much higher and larger, having connecting rooms, commodious enough to satisfy the whole party.

The roofs were domed and built of ice, but were high enough to permit the party to stand erect, quite an important consideration where there were so many.

The place consisted of a large center apartment, circular in form, a wide, low bench extending nearly around it, with inner rooms leading off, these being smaller but sufficiently large to hold three or four persons each.

What was singular was the presence of fireplaces, the appearance of which indicated that they had been recently used, for there were several huge chunks of bears' fat with wicks sticking in them and several bones, the pieces of flesh still hanging to them, as though they had lately formed the meal of some party of Esquimaux or Indians.

"We are the occupants now, at all events," said Phil, sitting down and starting one of the fatty lamps, "and if the real owners come back I shall be inclined to dispute possession with them."

Stopps had begun to prepare a meal for all hands, and in a short time the place was intolerably hot, there being no outlet for the smoke except the regular low entrance, and the party soon stripped off their outer garments and made cushions of them by spreading them upon the frozen benches around the side.

"This reminds me," said Peggs, "of the time that me and Bill Perkins got caught out in a snow storm up in Spitzbergen. Golly, but wasn't it cold! Bill had his copper-toed boots frozen, and the hair all came off his fur cap from the intense frigidity of the weather."

"Was Bill Perkins as big a liar as you?" asked Diggs, starting another round hole in a plug of tobacco."

"You shut up!" retorted Peggs. "Why, it was that cold that we wore our boots to pieces in less than half an hour, just running about to keep our toes warm."

"It was so cold that we could not open our mouths for fear of freezing solid, and our faces were covered with ice four inches thick, just from our breath freezin'."

"Why, the ice in my beard was so heavy that when I went to pull it off, it shaved me as clean as a baby, and I couldn't raise another spear of hair on my face for six months."

"Guess they put ye in jail for that period for telling such lies," interposed Diggs. "Peter, my boy, it's lucky I didn't have this chew in my mouth."

"Stick it in, then, and let it stop your noise. Well, as I was remarking, right in the midst of all this cold weather, it began to blow great guns, and I was stripped as clean as though I'd been to a church fair, and the cold away down so far that the thermometer wouldn't take any notice of it."

"The only thing to do was to run, but I started against the wind, and every step I took it blowed me back six feet. The dog I had with me tried to stop me, and commenced to bark, but the wind, rushing down his throat, turned him right square inside out, and sent him flying out to sea, schooner rigged."

"I faced about, and then I ran so fast that the sweat rolled off me in torrents, making a pond so big that it took me ten minutes to swim across it."

This was too much for Diggs, and he began to sputter and choke to an alarming degree, jumping up and down in his efforts to catch his breath.

Off came that leg in an instant, and bang! right between the blacksmith's broad shoulders with a force that would have felled an ox.

Out flew the quid of tobacco, taking Stopps in the eye, and nearly blinding him, causing him to howl with rage, and spill a kettle of soup he was carrying right over Peggs' good foot.

Then there was another howl, and for some time that ice hurt was the scene of the utmost confusion, Phil and his companions being in a roar over the gesticulations and gyrations of the cook, cooper and blacksmith.

Order was finally restored, and Stopps, having managed to save some of the supper, served it out all around, Peggs eating so fast that he could not find time to tell one of his stories.

After supper they all smoked and chatted, the storm outside being still too great to permit of their venturing out, and as they were comfortably housed they did not see the necessity of doing so.

One by one they rolled themselves up in their fur coats and blankets, and stretching out upon the low benches fell asleep, Phil being the last to drop off, and then not until he had convinced them that there was little or no need of keeping any lookout.

He was the first to stir in the morning, and went outside to see if the storm had abated so that they could continue their journey.

The sky was still dull and leaden, but there was no snow falling, the air being less cold than on the previous evening.

He thought that he would take a bit of a run before he returned, and he therefore started off across the ice at a rattling pace, taking the clear block of ice as a starting point and guide.

He had scarcely taken a dozen strides before a strange figure sprang up from the ice in front of him, and stood looking at him with the utmost ferocity.

It was the exact counterpart of the figure in the ice, and

was an inch or so over seven feet in height, being evidently very strong and of tremendous proportions.

His features were neither European, American nor Asiatic, and seemed to stamp him as belonging to an hitherto unknown race.

The figure in the ice did not belong to an extinct people then, for here was one of the same race alive and fierce as his frozen counterpart, and from all appearance likely to prove a formidable enemy.

CHAPTER V.

BILL BRACKETT ENCOUNTERS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

Let us return a while to the wreck of the Harpoon, and see how matters progress there during the absence of Phil and his party of explorers.

During the first day Bill Brackett was pretty quiet, and had very little to say, turning in quite early every night, and seeming to be determined to pass the time in sleeping, as if there was nothing else to do.

"He was up before any of the others the next morning, however, and after getting his own breakfast, started off alone over the ice, taking an ax and a gun, which latter was slung across his shoulder.

He cut marks in the ice from time to time, to serve as guides in making his way back, but kept on in a tolerably straight course for two or three hours.

Then he paused to rest and reconnoitre, for he had noticed certain marks in the fresh snow which told him that men of some sort were about, though he was greatly puzzled by the size of the footprints—those that he had seen being unusually large.

There seemed to be quite a number of them, as though a considerable party had passed that way, and not knowing whether they were friends or enemies, he determined to use the utmost caution until he could settle that point satisfactorily.

If the men were Esquimaux they might or might not be hostile, for though these people are generally favorably disposed toward the whites there have been instances of great cruelty and barbarity practiced by them, and Brackett knew this as well as any one.

He took care, therefore, to find a sheltered nook before he sat down, and one also which he could defend against odds if he were discovered by any hostile band.

After a while he began to examine his surroundings, and it was not long before he discovered, in a sort of icy knoll below him, a party of men, dressed in furs and armed with spears, sitting around in a circle, evidently engaged in deep conversation.

He could just hear the sound of their voices, but could not distinguish the words, though he soon came to the conclusion that this was because the men were conversing in an unknown tongue.

He crept closer to the party so that he could study their faces, and then he was terrified by their ferocious aspect, their great size and strength, and the fierce look in their swarthy countenances.

They all had long black beards, and their hair of the same color was coarse and shaggy, being more like the mane of a wild animal than the hair of a human being.

Their ears were large, and quite covered with hair on the back, and were also pointed at the top and bottom, thereby increasing the resemblance to animals which the singular creatures bore.

Their noses were flat, but quite large, the breadth of nostrils

being something remarkable, and their large, cruel-looking mouths were made more repulsive by double rows of protruding teeth, white and very sharp, the lips being thin and bloodless, and the tongue sharp and flat.

Their eyes were very large, and, being nearly blood-red in color, added greatly to the already fierce appearance of the strange creatures, who were evidently men, as they were gifted with speech, and seemed to possess power of understanding.

As Brackett lay ensconced behind a huge mass of ice, watching the movements of the singular group, there was a sudden commotion among them, and to his intense surprise he saw a man, evidently white like himself, walk fearlessly into their midst.

So far from molesting, they seemed to fairly reverence him, although they talked faster than ever, and crowded close around him.

He presently scattered them by an imperious wave of the hand, and then Bill caught the first good look at his face and form.

"Harpoons and bomb-lances!" he exclaimed, in great astonishment, utterly forgetting his past caution, "if it isn't Saul Sloper himself!"

The fierce creatures had heard the sound, and seemed greatly excited by it, rushing hither and thither, brandishing their spears and uttering the most savage cries.

Before Bill could escape he was discovered and dragged out of his hiding place by the uncanny wretches, in whose grasp he was but a child, although he was accounted a powerful man by his associates.

Trembling with fear, the rascal tried in vain to escape from his captors, who, with threatening gestures and the roughest usage, dragged him before the white man, who seemed to be their leader and master.

"For heaven's sake, Saul, call off these nasty beasts!" cried Bill. "Where in thunder did you pick 'em up?"

"Bill Brackett! How in the name of brimstone and cows' hoofs did you come here?" cried the other in astonishment.

"Make these ugly looking fiends take their paws off, and I'll tell you. D'ye mean to say that they're human critters?"

"'Bout as near to it as anyone born in these God-forsaken parts ever gets," answered the other; then, by a few unintelligible words, he secured Bill's release, the savage fellows obeying the man's commands at once, and treating Bill with a respect only second to that with which they regarded Saul.

"Tell me now, Saul Sloper, what are you doing in this horrible country?" said Bill, as the men withdrew.

"What are you doing yourself?"

"Looking for you. I was wrecked a while ago, and suspectin' you might be about, began hunting for you."

"It was lucky for you I turned up, for if I hadn't you'd 've been butchered for a certainty. These fellers hate white men."

"You seem to get on all right with 'em."

"Because they are afeard of me. They think I'm a little more'n human, and I don't undeceive 'em. But, I say, you old fox, there's suthin' at the bottom. What are ye out in the Arctics for?"

"To find you, I told you."

"What fur?"

"I'll tell ye bumbye. I want to hear about you fust. How in time do ye live up in these cold regions?"

"Huntin' and fishin'. Then there's wrecks; they supply provisions to last fur months. I'll show ye my storehouse. It ain't many miles away."

"Then we are on land?"

"Here we ain't. This is pack ice, drifting slowly along, but further south there's land, and plenty of it. Up north there's more, too."

"What is your storehouse? What do you keep in it?"

"Everything I need. My men gets the stuff for me from

the wrecks that are thrown up in this part. Crews wander off sometimes, and when they meet my men somehow or other they never get back."

Both men laughed at this, and the savages, who had been hanging about, withdrew to some little distance.

"I've got a house in the ice here," said Saul. "Come in and make yourself comfortable. I've got a bottle of brandy, and I reckon you'd like some on't."

"Reckon I would, Saul."

Sloper, who was a tall, angular, sinister-looking fellow, with round shoulders and long arms, clumsy feet and knock-knees, now led the way into an ice hut, the entrance of which was carefully hidden from sight; and here the two men stretched themselves out, and indulged in a half pint of spirits, after which they related their several experiences.

"The last time you saw me I was fust mate o' the North Star, bound fur the Arctic, I believe?" said Sloper.

"You was; and when we heard the North Star was lost, we never expected to hear from ye—leastways I didn't. Old Toby was sure you'd come back."

"Well, the North Star was wrecked, sure enough; but we might have got over that if it hadn't been for the people we met on land.

"They was the most savageous rascals you ever seed, and life wasn't worth a cent when they was around. They'd kill anything, no matter what.

"In the first place they was two great big fellows over seven feet high, strong and powerful, and looking like wild beasts, with their black beards, big ears, flat noses, and monstrous mouths."

"Why, these yer fellers I saw this while ago are just like that."

"They're the same critters. If they couldn't talk, you might think as how they was beasts."

"But how the mischief did you manage to escape from 'em if they're so savage? They look as if they'd do anything for ye."

"So they will. They dassn't cut up rough with me, I tell ye."

"But how do you manage it?"

"I'll tell ye when I git to it. Wall, the North Star was wrecked, and the inhabitants fell to butchering everybody they could find."

"Are they cannibals?"

"No; not unless they can't find anything else to eat; but they're naturally savage and fierce, killing whatever they see just for the fun of it."

"Wall, the North Star, being all broken up, and we at the mercy of these giants, it went pretty hard with us, you can bet. Every time a party went out, these fellows would fall on 'em and murder 'em to a man, until we darcint leave the place without being armed to the teeth.

"That didn't do much good, for they were stronger than we, and bumbye they didn't wait for us, but sallied right in upon our hidin' place, and butchered and slaughtered to their hearts' content."

"But how the deuce did you happen to get out?"

"Now, don't you stop me till I come to it. You let me tell my story just as I please, or I won't tell it at all."

"Go ahead, then; but hurry, 'cause I don't like the look of these cannibals peerin' in at us. How do you know they won't murder us both?"

"No fear," returned Sloper; and then he uttered a few words in some unknown tongue which sent the prying savages away from the entrance of the hut, where they had for the last few moments been gazing in with eager eyes.

"They won't bother you any more, so don't you worry. Big as they are, they obey me like as if I was their king, and I could have any one on 'em put to death if I just said the word."

"That brings us back to your story. Go ahead and give us the rest of it."

"Well, one after another all of our party was killed but me and two others, we happenin' to be the lucky ones, though we never could tell when our time was coming.

"One day me and the other fellers was sitting in the hut we had built out of the wreck of the North Star, and I had a small boat's compass in my hand, trying to settle on what course we had better take in getting away from the place.

"We had about made up our minds that it was better to starve or freeze to death than be butchered, and we was ready to make a run for it as quick as possible.

"As I was saying, I had the compass in my hand, and was explaining the best track we ought to take, when in bounced a couple o' dozen of them black-muzzled fiends, spears in hand, and regularly spitted my two mates.

"To tell the truth, I was too scared to run, and I just sat as still as death, a-lookin' at the compass, and wonderin' when they were going to run a pin through me an' stick me ag'in the wall.

"They took my coolness for bravery, I reckon, seein' me sittin' there so quiet, and began to crowd around me, lookin' at the compass what I still held in my hands, balanced on my knee.

"I kind o' wobbled, and that set the needle to goin'; but when it swung right around again in the right place they opened their eyes.

"Then they axed me what it was—or leastways I expect they did, for I couldn't understand their gibberish—and for answer I turned the box round and round, keeping my finger p'inted toward the needle.

"That was only by accident at fust, but when I see 'em watchin' that 'ere finger o' mine, I made out as if it was that what guided the needle and made it foller its movements, handlin' the box so's they wouldn't find out the cheat.

"Well, sir, they just thought I was some then, and when I p'inted out the north star to 'em, and showed 'em how the needle followed it, they allowed that I was a bigger man than they, and just went down and kissed my feet.

"I was smart enough to see the advantage I had gained, and I made it bigger by doing a lot of odd tricks in magic—simple ones enough—that I had learned when a youngster.

"Them 'ere big fellers made me the big gun of the tribe after that, and I lived like a fightin' cock, havin' the best of everything and doin' little or no work for it.

"I gradually learned their outlandish lingo, though I allus pretended to know what they said, and that gave me another advantage, 'cause once or twice I discovered some of 'em plottin' against me, and I quietly disposed of 'em in the night, pretending to know nothin' about it, and that made 'em think I knew everything.

"So I lived with 'em for five years, helpin' them in their raids against the Esquimaux, and the whites what occasionally came up, until now they'll do anything for me, and are as afraid of me as rats of a terrier."

"But tell me about those papers that old Toby wants. Have you got 'em?"

"No."

"Confound it all! Then I have come up into this miserable region for nothing!"

CHAPTER VI.

HEMMED IN BY A DEMONIAIC FOE.

Phil did not stop to look at the strange figure that had so suddenly appeared before him; but retreated at once, thinking discretion the better part of valor.

It was well he did not remain in the near vicinity of the ferocious-looking stranger, as the latter with a fierce cry of rage and hate sprang forward upon the instant and caught up a spear which lay upon the ground some little distance away.

By this time Phil had put a mass of ice between himself and the giant, and was thus protected from his assaults, although still in danger.

The creature upon recovering his spear hurled it at Phil; but instead of its striking him, it came in contact with an ice hummock, which it penetrated to a considerable depth, and remained quivering there, while Phil improved his opportunity, and making a good use of his legs regained the hut where he and his comrades had passed the night.

As he did so, and while he was passing through the low entrance, he heard his angry pursuer utter a shrill and peculiar cry, which was presently taken up and repeated at a distance.

"This fiend has fellow-companions, then, and he is calling to them," thought Phil. "Heaven help us if we fall into their hands."

When he reached the interior of the hut he hastily awoke his comrades and told them what he had seen and his reasons for feeling alarmed.

"This place must belong to them," suggested Stopps. "It is a good deal too big for ordinary-sized men to live in. Do you suppose they will come back to it?"

"Undoubtedly," answered Phil.

"What makes you think so?"

"This fellow saw me enter."

"The deuce!"

"And has called for his friends."

"Hark!"

That unearthly cry, sounding as nearly like the howl of a wolf as any sound can be made by the human voice, came distinctly to the ears of all at that moment, and Phil, seizing an ax, cried:

"We must defend this place with our lives, for if they get in we are lost!"

"Hark!"

The cry was repeated again and again, each time sounding nearer and with increased force, as though the number of the enemy was constantly increasing.

"This place was built for 'em, and they know how to get in," said Peggs. "The fust thing to do is to keep 'em out by lowering the entrance."

With that he seized one of the axes, and by a few sturdy blows succeeded in cutting off a large block of ice from the wall of the outer passage, which he and his companions pushed into the entrance, thus impeding the progress of anyone who sought to gain an admittance into the inner chambers.

"That's it," said Phil. "Now, hack off another one just like that. Haste, for God's sake, for they are already outside!"

This was true, for the entrance was at that moment darkened by some huge object, and the cry of rage which followed showed them the demons just beyond them had discovered the means taken by the besieged to keep them out.

The axes flew fast and fierce, and in a few moments a second huge splinter of ice was detached from the walls.

This was pushed forward and served as a wedge for the first block, which the savage was already trying to push aside.

Being of an irregular shape, the second splinter served admirably to prevent the first from being dislodged, besides filling up several large cracks, through which it would have been an easy matter to hurl a spear at those within.

There were chinks still left, but these were mere loop-holes, through which the huge spears of the terrible creatures out-

side could not force a way, but which would nevertheless serve the party within.

A gun-barrel could be thrust through them, and this seemed to strike Phil at once.

"Give me your gun, Diggs," he cried, "while you and Hudson, with Block, examine the other parts of the hut to see if there are any other means of getting up."

Seizing the weapon, and ascertaining that it was loaded and primed, the plucky young fellow thrust the barrel through a crack in the ice, and let drive before even some of his comrades were aware of his intention.

Bang!

The report rang out with startling distinctness, the echoes being sharp and clear, a howl of rage from the outside following the unexpected shot.

"You hit the mark that time, I'll bet," said Peggs, dancing about on his wooden leg. "'Spect them fellers don't altogether know what it means."

"Give me another weapon, quick, and reload this!" cried Phil, passing the still smoking piece to Peggs, and snatching another from Stopps, there being but three in the party.

Bang!

Again the unaccustomed sound rang in the ears of the blood-thirsty besiegers, and again the howl of mingled pain and rage told that the swift-winged messenger of death had done its work all too well.

"By gosh! I'll bet that those 'ere lead pills don't settle at all well on their stomachs," chuckled Peggs, as Phil took his third weapon from the hands of Andrews and threw it into position.

By that time the party on the outside had evidently come to the conclusion that they were in rather warm quarters, and had commenced a retreat.

Two of their number had been killed outright in a manner most unaccountable to them, and without their yet having had a chance to get at their detested enemies, the whites, and it seemed high time that they should adopt some less fatal method of gaining an entrance.

They therefore began to retreat, leaving the bodies of their dead companions in the passage until a more favorable opportunity for removing them should present itself.

Swift as they were, they were not quick enough to escape another blow from the courageous boy just beyond them, their numbers preventing any very rapid progress in such a confined place.

Bang!

For the third time that terrible sound startled the echoes, and for the third time the angel of death closed his strong grasp around his victim.

The passage was full of dense, sulphurous smoke, which penetrated to the rooms occupied by the little party, causing old Peggs to sneeze most violently.

"By darn!" he ejaculated, "I oughtn't to sneeze, seein' as how Phil has been doin' us such a good turn in gettin' rid of these savagaceous critters. By the way, that reminds me——"

"They ain't no other way of gettin' in," interrupted Diggs, who had just returned, "but if we want to get out we kin do it."

"How so?"

"Why, down yonder, in a room what we didn't notice before, there's a hole which we kin drop through onto a bank of snow 'bout twenty foot below. There's a cliff or bank of some kind at that p'int, and this yer house is built on the aidge of it. We kin get out, but these duffers can't get in."

"We may have to make use of that means of getting away from our enemies," observed Phil; "but at present we had better stay here."

"You think it likely that they know of this, and will be there watchin' for us?"

"Yes; that is just what I do think."

"I'll be capsized!" muttered Peggs, "if that don't remind me——"

"Oh, bother your reminders!" sputtered Stopps. "If you don't stop your jaw, you'll be reminded of an earthquake!" and the irate cook shook his sturdy fist in a manner that spoke volumes.

"Don't quarrel," said Phil, quietly; "for we'll have enough of that with our friends outside to occupy our attention, without getting up any fuss between ourselves."

"They've gone, ain't they?" inquired Block.

"For the present; but no doubt they are thinking of some means by which to force us out."

"Then let's strengthen this 'ere, so that they won't," suggested Diggs. And in the absence of the besiegers the besieged began making their place of refuge stronger and less easy to enter than it already was.

In the midst of their work, one of the sailors gave utterance to a startling cry, and at the next instant fell to the ground writhing in agony.

Then it was discovered that a hole had been made in the ceiling of one of the rooms, and a spear thrust through by the men outside.

The blade had penetrated to the poor fellow's very brain, and being evidently impregnated with some virulent poison, had caused the most intense suffering.

As the dying man, who was Block, fell to the floor in his death struggle, Phil glanced up, having been attracted to the spot by his comrade's cries, and he saw a malignant face peering down upon him through the hole in the roof.

The eyes were blood red, the nose flat, the ears large and pointed, and the mouth savage and cruel, the thick beard adding fierceness to the whole.

It was one of the dreaded enemy—one of the race hitherto unknown—and beyond him could be seen others all equally terrible.

Quick as a flash, Phil seized a loaded gun, and before the face could be withdrawn discharged its contents full in the creature's hideous eyes.

There was a howl and a scurry, and then the increased light in the place told the besieged that the enemy had again retreated.

At the same moment, however, a cry from the entrance announced that the monsters had almost forced the passage with a ram, and that in another instant the whole party would be upon them.

"To the hole!" shouted Phil. "That is our only chance."

All hands made a rush to the outer chamber, but on looking through the aperture by which they intended to escape, what was their horror to behold a dozen of their gigantic foes squatted upon the ice all ready to receive them.

"We are hemmed in on every side," said Phil. "There is no help for us; but let us perish as brave men should, fighting to the last!"

CHAPTER VII.

AN EXTRAORDINARY COLLOQUY—DANGER.

"You haven't got the papers?" asked Bill once more, when his first pang of disappointment had passed.

"That's what I said," replied Saul, coolly.

"But you know where they are?"

"Perhaps I do."

"Then, for goodness sake, man, spit it out. These papers are worth a fortune, once Phil Gleason is out of the way."

"But he isn't."

"He will be."

"Perhaps."

"Look here, Saul," said Bill in great vexation, "you know as well as me that there's money to be made on these papers."

"Shouldn't wonder."

"If there wasn't, old Toby Coddington wouldn't 've sent me clear out here to find you and bring 'em to him. Would he now?"

"Reckon he knows the valyer on 'em as well as any man."

"Do you know what they refer to?"

"To Phil Gleason, I reckon."

"But in what way?"

"Couldn't say."

"You mean you won't."

"No, I don't."

"But you ought to know what's in 'em."

"How so?"

"You've had 'em, ain't you?"

"Who said so?"

"But you have."

"That's news to me."

"Then, having had 'em, you ought to know what's in 'em."

"But I don't, all the same."

"Can't you read?"

"A little, if it's in plain writin'."

"And you mean to say that having these papers, you never found out what they contained?"

"I never said I had 'em."

"Well, you did, didn't you?"

"Did what?"

"Have 'em."

"You said so, and I ain't goin' to make you out a liar, whatever I makes o' myself."

"You won't say up and down whether you ever had 'em or not, then, will you?"

"No."

"But you know their value?"

"Yes, or leastwise I kin guess at it. Old Toby wouldn't ha' sent for 'em if they wasn't wuth suthin'."

"But ain't you willin' to make a fortune out'n 'em?"

"Does Toby Coddington offer one?"

"Well, no, he don't."

"What does he offer?"

"Wull, that's the closest ye've come to the p'int yet. He offers me a thousand to bring you back or the papers, or give him information which will tell him where to get 'em easy."

"He does that?"

"Yes."

"What does he offer?" asked Saul, becoming the questioner in his turn.

"Nothing."

"Oh, he don't?"

"He didn't say nothin' about that part."

"Oh!"

After getting rid of this monosyllable in a manner which bespoke complete satisfaction or perfect indifference, it would be hard to tell which, Saul straightened himself out, yawned, drummed on the snow with his big feet, and finally said:

"Got any 'bacco? They don't grow it here, and the last lot I got from the whites is played out."

"Look here, Saul," said Bill, giving the other a good-sized plug, "are you trying to play me for a fool or not?"

"Reckon you can do that yourself, without trying very hard."

"'Cause if you are, you'll find it a hard job. You've got them papers?"

"So you said before."

"See here."

"I'm lookin'."

"Old Toby Coddling is a rascal."

"The breed ain't all dead yet; it's the fools what keeps 'em alive."

"Them papers is wuth a heap to him."

"Specs they are."

"And we can get our own price for 'em. You ain't had no bargain with him, and you can make him pay what you like. Then we divide between us, and we're both rich."

"Oh, we divide, do we?" asked Saul, in a sort of stupid amazement.

"Certainly."

"What fur?"

"'Cause I come an' told you all about his wantin' 'em."

"That was kind of you, wasn't it—real tender-hearted."

"Will you let me have 'em?"

"If I had 'em? No."

"Would you go back, then, and sell 'em to Toby?"

"Go back to Bedford, and face an indictment for murder? Not much."

"That's all forgotten about now."

"It is? I reckon not. The man I put out of the way had friends, and they're living yet. Didn't I have to slip away under a false name, and board the North Star at Nantucket so's not to be nabbed? Toby knows all about it, and would clap me in jail quicker'n scat, get the papers away from me, and see me yanked up with a smile on his ugly face."

"But if I made the bargain? Can't ye trust me with the papers?"

"I haven't got 'em."

"And don't know where they are?"

"No."

"And never did?"

"No."

"What made Toby say you had?"

"To get you out of the way."

"But he wants Phil Gleason, and that's why I went with him."

"He knowed you'd never come back alive. Precious few does."

"He wouldn't take even that risk if that was what he was up to."

"Oh, yes, he would."

"No, he wouldn't; for he wants me to come back and fetch the papers."

"You won't do it."

Bill Brackett said nothing, but what he thought was this:

"You're playing a deeper game than even I can understand, Saul, and you're lying like the fiend himself. You've got the papers, and I'm going to have them. I can't make a trade with you. I wish to thunder I knew more about their purport, and then I might strike a trade with you."

Saul sat in silence some minutes watching Bill's face, which, however, was as far from being read as his own, and then said:

"Got through?"

"Yes."

"Can you listen to me for a shake?"

"Yes."

"I've got something to propose."

"What is it?"

"Stay with me and go into business."

"How?"

"Traders come here sometimes, and generally get wrecked. Me and my midgets here we collars the stuff and gets rid of the traders. I sell what I can to the Esquimaux below and al-

ways gets some money out of the ships. Bumbye, we kin go back to civilized parts."

"And throw up this chance?"

"Wull, that can't be helped, 'cause I ain't got the papers, so we might as well do the next best thing."

"Did your fiends outside murder the captain and his party?"

"Reckon they did."

"And are ready to do the same for the rest of us?"

"Reckon they are, leavin' you out."

"If you'll have 'em get rid of Phil and give me the proofs, that'll be one point gained."

"I'll do it. Where is he?"

"Out on a scout."

"All right. How many's left at the wreck?"

"Perhaps ten."

"I'll get rid of them first."

"All right."

"You must take me with yer and say I'm a poor ship-wrecked cuss you found. Once inside I can let in our boys and the thing's done."

"You mustn't kill the girl."

"Oh, there's a girl in there?"

"Yes."

"And you're sweet on her?"

"Sort o' that way."

"She'll be safe then. Reckon you've been away long enough, so let's go back."

"Is this all of your party?"

"No, the rest have gone out huntin', I reckon."

"On the track of the scouting party?"

"Shouldn't wonder?"

"Well, we'll go back if you say so, but these imps mustn't show themselves."

"They won't—"

With that the two worthless left the hut, Saul saying something to the horrible creatures he commanded that sent them scurrying away among the hummocks, where they were soon lost from sight.

After walking for some time they came in sight of the wreck, the red flag still flying from the stump of a mast, which caused Saul to say:

"Pretty good sign that, to tell my fellows just where to look, though I reckon they'd find the place without it. How are you going to hail 'em? Will they let you in?"

"To be sure. They don't suspect nothin' yet."

When they reached the house of the castaways they were admitted by Charlie, who was surprised to find that Bill had a companion, and still more so to hear that he had been lost like themselves.

Saul was welcomed heartily by all hands, and made as comfortable as he could desire, his sad story, made up for the occasion, greatly interesting all who heard it.

Mollie was particularly moved, and begged Charlie to see that the poor man, as she called him, wanted for nothing, even administering to his fancied wants herself.

So the day passed, and at night the wanderers betook themselves to rest with every confidence, little knowing the dreadful danger that threatened them.

It was about midnight when Charlie Mercer suddenly awoke with a strange feeling at his heart that all was not right, and yet totally unable to account for the feeling.

Perfect quiet reigned, both within and without, there being not a sound to disturb the stillness, and all his companions sleeping peacefully.

The sense of danger so completely unmastered him, however, that he arose, drew on his trousers and boots, which lay close to his bunk, threw a heavy fur coat over him, and

walked through the dimly lighted passage until he reached the door leading up on deck.

This was the only means of exit, the hatches having been closed and barred to keep out the cold, and the open part in the side having been also strongly protected, as well to ward off the weather as a protection from wandering polar bears, predatory Esquimaux, and any other possible foes, both quadruped and biped.

As he reached the door, the young fellow perceived a strong draught, the cause of which he soon discovered, the door being slightly ajar, and the wind blowing in quite freshly through the opening thus made.

"How careless for them to leave it open," he murmured. "We have ventilation enough without it, and no one knows what might walk in upon us during the night."

Then he closed and strongly barred it, the feeling of anxiety abating somewhat, although he still felt uneasy in his mind.

He walked all through the vessel, looking at the fires to see that there was no danger to be apprehended from that source, and examining the bulkheads to discover if perchance the ice had encroached any more upon them.

Finding all apparently in good condition, he went back to his bunk and slept a good hour, when he was again suddenly aroused from his repose by the same feeling as before.

This time it was much stronger, and quickly leaping from his bed, he made his way in his underclothes alone to the companion ladder.

He found the door wide open now, although there seemed to be no one stirring.

He was about to close it, when hearing a noise above him, he glanced up and saw half a dozen gigantic forms upon the deck just ready to descend.

They were men, but the most hideous creatures he had ever seen, the bright moonlight showing their features with remarkable distinctness.

They were unlike anything he had ever seen in the human race, and a shudder passed through him as he beheld their cruel faces, and saw them regarding him with fierce looks, such as a pack of wolves might give to a flock of frightened sheep.

"My God! there is danger there!" he cried, and swinging the door to with a loud slam, he hastily barred and locked it, calling to his companions at the very moment that the spears of the enemy crashed against the outside.

CHAPTER VIII.

FIGHTING AGAINST AWFUL ODDS—THE ESCAPE.

The situation of Phil and his companions was a critical one, and well might they turn pale at the thought of the perils which encompassed them.

Hemmed in upon all sides by a race of fiends, besieged in an ice hut which at best could afford them but a temporary shelter, cut off from all communication with their friends, and despairing of getting any assistance, they might well give way to feelings of the deepest gloom.

"Let us sell our lives dearly," cried Phil again, taking a gun from Peggs, who was the most excited one of the whole party.

As one of the terrible beings below was about poisoning his spear for a blow, Phil leveled his gun and blazed away, taking the monster in the breast and causing him to fall back among his companions, the spear dropping from his nerveless hand.

Half a dozen spears came whizzing through the opening, and Andrews was struck in the side before he could retreat.

The poor fellow dropped right across the opening, closing

it up, and before he could be dragged away he received a score of wounds, which soon put an end to his life, the poison from the spears coursing like lightning through his veins, his sufferings being most intense, although death put a speedy end to his agony.

"To the entrance!" shouted Phil. "These villains cannot enter at this place. Stay behind, Stopps, and keep watch."

Then hurrying to the other entrance, Phil was just in time to see a huge fellow just forcing his way through the passage, spear in hand, and a look of triumph upon his dark face.

Clubbing his gun upon the instant, Phil dealt the wretch a stunning blow upon the head, which knocked him senseless, and shattered the stock, leaving the barrel remaining in his hands.

A second savage was just behind, and him the plucky lad hammered across the face with the gun barrel.

The blows fairly rained upon the monster's head and shoulders, and howling with rage, he endeavored to retreat, but was prevented by his companions, who crowded behind him, trying to push their way in.

Diggs fired a heavy charge into the face of one that was endeavoring to get through the opening in the roof, and his body falling half way in, effectually put a stop to any more entering in that way.

Peggs, with the third gun, brought down a fellow just behind Phil's victim, who was at that moment knocked senseless by a well-directed blow upon the skull, which put a decided quietus upon him, not only for the moment, but for all time.

The man that Peggs had brought down having fallen in a heap across the passage, the entrance was now blocked up, and the men outside prevented from getting in.

This caused a cessation of hostilities for an instant, and gave the besieged time to reload and get their breath before resuming their fight for life.

Then it was suddenly discovered that but six or seven charges of ammunition remained, there being but two guns which could be used—Phil's being good for nothing except a club, and being decidedly battered and bent from the severe usage which it had already seen.

"Blow me if they ain't trying to hammer in the roof at another place," said Hudson, after a pause.

"Them spears are as big as spades," added Diggs, "and as sharp as razors. They can't be steel, and I never thought bone could be made so strong and sharp. They're nasty things to fight with."

"Look out!" cried Phil, in a shrill warning at that instant.

The caution was well timed, for a huge block of ice, loosened by the spears of the human fiends outside, came tumbling in, narrowly missing crushing Hudson beneath its weight.

In the opening thus formed could be seen the hideous faces of a half score of black-bearded demons, and each struggling with the other to gain an entrance.

The first one received a blow from an ax in the hands of Hudson, while Peggs, unscrewing his steel-tipped leg, brought wisdom to the benighted brain of a second, and caused him to drop limp and nearly lifeless upon the edge of the opening.

"Blaze away!" yelled Phil, excitedly, and Diggs and one of the landsmen obeyed, killing two of the enemy, and making the rest howl with rage.

Crowding one upon the other, they hurled their spears, to which thongs of reindeer leather were fastened, so that they could be withdrawn, in among the party of whites, and three of the landsmen received fatal wounds, dying in great torture in a few moments.

Peggs battered away at the foe with his wooden leg, hopping about upon the good one in a manner that would have been most comical, had not the situation been so perilous.

Indeed, he was so lively that not one of the savages could

get a blow in at him, and he made more than one howling demon feel the strength of his sturdy arm.

Diggs used up all his charges, and made every one of them tell upon the foe, who seemed to be as numerous as ever, despite the losses already caused by the brave little band of defenders.

Stopps presently returned, and reported that the party below the cliff appeared to have gone to the assistance of their companions in front, and that the way was clear for a retreat.

Diggs seized the gun which one of the landsmen had dropped, and hastily reloading it, fired the last charge of all among the horde outside, causing them to retreat for the instant, leaving the coast clear.

"Now for it," said Phil, in a hoarse whisper. "We must leave our poor friends behind, for our lives are yet in great peril."

There were left now only Phil, Peggs, Diggs, Stopps and Hudson, the others having all been killed by the demons without.

In the lull which followed the sudden disappearance of the enemy, Peggs restored his wooden leg to its proper place, and, shouldering an ax, followed his companions, who had already made their way toward the opening in the rear.

A quick glance showed Phil that the giants had left their quarters at the base of the cliff, and a roar at the front telling him that those at that point were again entering, he quickly dropped through upon the snow, being followed at once by Diggs and Hudson.

He perceived that the cliff extended for some little distance, and that not far ahead was a little bay, the waters of which, not entirely frozen over, were dotted here and there with icebergs, some being quite large, though the majority very small affairs.

"The winter has not set in entirely, then," observed Phil, "and if we could make a raft and launch it, there might still be a chance for escape."

"Hurry up!" cried Stopps, dropping down upon the snow. "Them fellers up there have got in and are making the old boy's own fuss at not finding us."

"Where is Peggs?" inquired the others, anxiously, not wishing to lose their eccentric companion.

"Here I am," answered the man himself, dropping down at that moment, and driving his peg so deeply into the snow that he had to be pulled out by his comrades.

By the outcry above, the foe had evidently entered the hut, and as the little party hurried off, they narrowly missed being struck by a shower of huge lumps of ice, which came rattling down from above.

The infuriated wretches defeated their own purpose, for in breaking down the walls and hurling the blocks of ice down at the whites, they presently closed up the exit so effectually with the sharp-cornered missiles, some of which were quite large, that even their efforts were unavailing to free the passage for many moments.

They howled and raved, hacking away at the blocks which, by their own efforts, had prevented their getting at the whites, and it was some little time ere the hole was again free.

Then they dropped through upon the snow, but by that time the pursued had disappeared from view, not the slightest trace of them being visible.

Their foot-prints were a partial guide, to be sure, but these presently ceased when they struck the hard ice, and no trace remained to show where they had gone.

Up and down ran the enraged demons, seeking their prey, but these were not to be found, and venting their anger in hoarse cries, the creatures turned their steps toward the lights above them, and sought the direction of the wreck.

CHAPTER IX.

A WONDROUS HIDING PLACE—IMPRISONED.

How had our hero and his comrades escaped from their fiendish pursuers, and what sure retreat were they now ensconced in that they so completely eluded discovery?

They were certainly not far away, and to tell the truth, beheld every movement of their pursuers, and saw them give up the chase with emotions of the deepest joy.

"I never was so glad of anything since I lost my leg," said Peggs, while Diggs began a fresh circle in his tobacco plug, stowing away enough in one cheek to make one think he had the mumps.

"I say, you'll get one-sided if you do that," said Stopps. "I should think you'd lose your balance."

"That wouldn't be nothing," interposed Peggs, "for he ain't ever been well balanced. His top story is too light altogether. Leaving that out of the question, I never was so glad since I lost my leg."

"You wasn't glad then, was you?" asks Diggs.

"To be sure I was."

"Glad you lost your leg?"

"Yes."

"What was there to be glad about in that?"

"Lots."

"For instance?"

"Why, I had only half the bother in tying up my shoes that I had before it was took off."

"H'm!" began Diggs, and then he laughed, snorted, choked and finally swallowed his chew of tobacco, and had to be thumped on the back before he recovered.

However, we haven't said where our friends were all this time, and, therefore, we had better go back to the time when Peggs was pulled out of the snow after his rapid descent from the ice hut, and tell what happened after that.

Seeing that the enemy had not yet appeared, our friends hurried along the base of the cliff toward the little bay, and after a few minutes turned the corner of a sharp crag and were hidden from sight.

At this moment the natives left the hut, but not seeing the whites stood deliberating for a few moments before they struck the trail, the imprint of Peggs' wooden leg with its steel point being quite plain in the snow.

When they reached the crag the party had again disappeared, and there were no traces of them.

This was accounted for as follows:

Phil knew that the natives must soon succeed in tracking them, and he, therefore, urged his friends with all speed toward the ice-lined shores of the bay, hoping that they would there find some place of refuge.

Leaping from block to block, shut out from the sight of the natives, they at last reached a small berg, which seemed to have grounded.

Upon this they at once leaped and crouched down upon the ice, Stopps having suddenly perceived one of the natives in advance of the others, although the man did not see him.

Suddenly the berg, shaken by the leaping upon it of the little party, began to move, having been before merely at rest, and not grounded, as was supposed.

Being caught by the current, it moved swiftly out into the bay and made its way along the shore in plain sight of the howling natives, who paid it no attention, as they were well used to such sights, and had no idea that those they sought were closely ensconced in its icy recesses.

When Stopps dropped upon the ice and called to his companions to do the same, he discovered an opening not far

from him, and into this they all made their way, being completely hidden from sight of any one on shore.

The whole party, numbering a full score, now appeared, but Phil and the rest cared nothing for them so long as they were not discovered, and in any event it would not make much difference, as there were no present means of reaching the berg.

The opening in the ice where the whites were concealed was what is called a "screw," such places being common in icebergs, being formed by natural means.

These openings are formed by vacuums, or by knots or flaws in the ice, which meet and give way, leaving the thicker ice all around, as the berg moves through the water, the action of the waves having much to do with the making of the screw.

They generally lead straight down through the ice to the water, which, dashing up as the berg moves, wears away the ice to a smooth, glittering surface, forming also ledges here and there as the spray freezes.

When one of these screws becomes large, it sometimes causes the berg to be lighter on one side than another, and hence the splitting or over-balancing, which is such a common sight to Arctic travelers.

The sides of the particular screw into which our party had found their way were pierced with loop holes, formed by the action of the water, and perhaps from rain or sleet, and through the apertures thus made the wanderers could see every movement of the natives, and be themselves unseen.

At the point where the whites entered, the berg towered to a height of some fifteen feet, there being a wide ledge upon which the party could stand, the screw extending down spirally to the water, the roar of which, as it swashed and dashed up into the opening, being quite loud, though not enough so to drown our friends' voices.

Along the shore the berg moved majestically, the whites having a full view of the party of natives up to the time that they ascended the heights and disappeared behind the mounds of snow and ice.

"This is all very well," said Phil, "but while we have escaped from these demons we are still far from our friends, and have not yet discovered any traces of friendly inhabitants."

"And goodness only knows where we are drifting to," added Diggs. "This is a strange adventure, blow me if it isn't."

"Yes, and that reminds me," began Peggs, "of the time me and Josh Perkins, Bill's cousin, got lost in the crater of a volcaner in the Pacific Ocean. May'be ye'd like to hear about it?"

Without waiting to hear an expression of opinion upon this subject, however, our worthy friend settled himself down upon his bundle and began his narrative.

"Me and Josh was out huntin' for rabbits on the island, having been without grub for three weeks, when a thundering high snow storm came up and nearly blinded us.

"Why, you wouldn't believe it, but in less'n a minute there was two foot o' snow around us, and we was afraid of being buried, and so we would have been if Josh hadn't seen a rabbit's ears sticking out of a hole about three miles off.

"This was a jackass rabbit, you understand, and that accounts for our being able to see it so far, for one ear of a rabbit of that kind will make a cloak for a good-sized man.

"Well, we just put for that hole, being nearly choked by the tall grass, which sprung up all around us, the sun being so hot that we could see the stuff growing and getting ripe while we was running.

"Josh and me pretty nearly got drowned in that pond, but we swummed like fishes, and bumbye tumbled into the hole where we had seen the jack rabbit, and blest if it didn't begin to spit fire and brimston' like the old Nick.

"We runned in, though, to get out of the rain, and afore we knowed it we was lost in the sulphurous passages, and wandered about for six weeks afore we got out, and even then—"

"Good Lord, is there any more?" cried Diggs, beginning to gasp and turn red in the face.

Then his treacherous quid slipped down his big throat, and he choked and spluttered for five minutes, until the load, having reached his stomach and settled down for a quiet life, gave him a respite.

"Peter Peggs, you are the biggest liar I ever seed," he then began.

"Why so?" inquired Peggs, innocently.

"First you have a snow storm in the Pacific Ocean, and then you have it so hot that you can see the grass grow, and then you fetch in a pond that you hadn't said anything about, and then you have a rain storm, and the dickens knows what you wouldn't have had next if I hadn't choked."

"Well, that ain't my fault."

"Who's going to pay for my 'backy, I'd like to know? That makes six chews I've lost to-day."

"You ain't lost that one, 'cause you know where it is. Take a dose o' salt water and you'll find it again."

Diggs did not deign to make any answer to this practical suggestion, and presently Stopps made another.

"What do you say to something to eat?" he asked. "We've all got our grub with us, and I reckon we're all hungry. We can't help having lost the poor fellows that were with us, and we've got to look out for ourselves."

"There is clearly nothing to be done," answered Phil, "much as we may mourn the loss of our poor comrades. We are safe for the present, and I see no reason why we should not satisfy our appetites."

There was no means of procuring a fire, but, as most of the food which they carried was cooked, this did not make it so bad, although it would have been more comfortable had they been seated around a cheery blaze enjoying himself.

While they were engaged in eating their lunch, the berg continued to drift along the bleak shores of the little bay, keeping well out from the ice, and though it now made but slight progress, getting no nearer to any object from which they might reach the main land, as they termed it.

Thus the short day wore on, and night came down, dark and gloomy, the clouds gathering thick around them, and evidences of snow being apparent.

Fortunately, they were all warmly clad, and had extra fur coats and blankets in their bundles; so that there was no danger of their suffering from the cold, which was not as intense as it had been.

Ascending into the screw, where there was room to lie down, and where it was more sheltered than below, the five wanderers stretched themselves out in their warm wraps, covering up their hands and faces, and one by one dropped off to sleep, despite their strange situation, as though they had been in the warm beds aboard the ship.

During the night the berg drifted in shore and remained fast; but not one of the party awoke, the snow falling silently all around them, and closing up every avenue of escape.

Thick and fast it fell, drifting higher and higher about the entrance to their odd retreat, and packing itself in a solid mass in every nook and cranny, keeping out the cold air and wind, but at the same time locking in the castaways as securely as though they had been embedded in the ice.

All through the night and well into the next day it continued to fall, and in the semi-twilight which reigned, the party slept on as though it were still night.

Silently and swiftly it fell and drifted, until the very appearance of the berg was changed, the sharp peaks and

turret-like prominences being softly rounded and molded into domes by the soft mantle which fell over all.

And then, while they slept on, unconscious of all that passed, the five friends were in the midst of a danger totally unforeseen and from which there would be little chance of escaping.

The snow ceased falling at last, and shortly after the little party awoke to find themselves imprisoned in an iceberg with no chance of release.

CHAPTER X.

CHARLIE SUSPECTS TREACHERY.

"Hallo, there!" shouted Charlie, when he saw that he was safe for the moment. "Wake up, everybody! Van Dam, Blake, Brackett, Sloper, all hands turn out! We are in danger!"

Brackett and Sloper were the first to appear, the latter making a rush for the door at once, as if to undo its fastenings.

"Don't do that!" cried Charlie, seizing the man by the arm. "That's where the danger is!"

"Ain't the ship on fire?" asked Bill, giving Saul a peculiar look.

"No; but there's a lot of terrible-looking fellows outside that'll make mincemeat of you if you show yourself."

In another instant the two villains would have fallen on Charlie, torn him away, and opened the door, but they interchanged mutual glances. Van Dam and the others appeared and asked what the trouble was, Charlie quickly explaining all to them.

"How vos dot door come left open?" asked Van Dam, the Dutch steward. "I ton't understand me dot."

"We ain't never had it shut before," said Bill.

"Yah, I know dot; but him shut once, and den him wide open once more when Sharlie come out."

"I might possibly have neglected to fasten it the first time, and the wind blew it open, although, if I recollect right, I did lock it when I first discovered it open."

"Perhaps you only closed it, and thought you locked it!" suggested Sloper. "You was only half awake, I reckon."

"No; I had all my senses about me, and now I think of it, I did lock it; yes, I am positive of it."

"You locked it?"

"I put the bar up."

"What use was there to do that? You ain't never been troubled with your neighbors, have ye?"

"No; but I felt uneasy. Besides, bears might walk in, and—anyhow, the door shouldn't be left open. Suppose the weather should change suddenly.

"What's that?" asked one of the men, as the pounding on the door was renewed.

"It's the crowd outside," replied Charlie. "Luckily there's no other way that they can get in, as we are so completely blocked in by the ice, and we can certainly hold this against them."

"What sort of fellows did you say they were?" asked Sloper.

Charlie described the men as nearly as he could remember from having had such a slight glance at them, and Sloper retorted:

"Guess you saw some shadder. They ain't no such big fellers up in these yer parts. They're all little, small, chunky fellers—all train oil and bears' grease."

"But I am positive——"

"Sho! I've ben in these parts afore, and I know just what the Esquimaux is. I've seen heaps on 'em, and I never saw one over five feet."

"But these were not Esquimaux."

"Supposin' they were Injuns, that would be too big for 'em. No, young feller, the moonlight deceived ye, and made ye think they was big when they wasn't. I know the natives of this country, and they wouldn't hurt a fly."

"I don't care to have them so near, at all events."

"I'll speak to 'em," said Sloper, and putting his mouth to the keyhole he pronounced a few words in that strange tongue, which caused those outside to cease their hostile demonstrations at once.

One of the natives replied, and Sloper said to the party inside:

"He says that he would like to see us, and that his folks have no idea of hurting us."

"For all that, I don't mean to give them the chance."

"They could bust in here if they chose, for they are strong little fellows. Suppose I open the door?"

While the man had been standing by the door he had unfastened it, and now threw it open, saying to the savages in their own tongue:

"Don't harm them now, and after a while I will betray them to you. At present they must not suspect any evil."

To this the chief replied, bowing respectfully:

"The white man will be obeyed. Max will not harm the men in the ship until he gives the word."

"What him said to you?" asked the Hollander.

"He says he and his men are glad to see you, and will lead you to their village if you want to go."

"Have they seen Phil and his party?" asked Charlie.

"How has the exploring party fared?" asked Sloper.

"A part of our band has followed them, but they have not yet returned," replied the giant.

"He says they are in the village and have sent for you," was the interpretation that Sloper made of this speech.

"How far is it?"

"About thirty miles; but you couldn't find the way alone."

"We cannot go to them to-night," replied Charlie. "Let them wait outside till morning, and we will then decide what to do."

"They don't want to stay out there all night."

"We can't accommodate 'em all, and they can burrow in the snow. Shut the door and tell 'em to wait."

"I don't see no harm in that," said Brackett, who, to tell the truth, did not fancy leaving the natives enter the ship, fearing that they might take a notion to kill him as well as the rest during the night.

"Wait till another time, and I'll let you in," said Saul. "They don't like your looks."

"We can dash in quickly and dispatch them in a moment," said the chief.

"Max can wait. The whites are armed, and will fight hard. They will kill many. You must wait."

"The false traveler will keep his word?"

"Has he ever broken it?"

"He has not."

"And he won't. Be content to wait until a better time."

"I am content."

"What does he say?"

"That they will show us the way in the morning. They don't want to come in, but had rather sleep out in the snow."

"Den you had petter shut te tcor right away soon," said Van Dam.

Sloper then shut the door, and Charlie barred and locked it, waiting until Sloper and Brackett had retired before he left it.

He was not altogether satisfied with the situation, for he had seen at a glance that the strange men were perfect giants, and not dwarfs, like ordinary Esquimaux, and if Sloper had lied in this instance, he might easily do so in another.

He did not like the expression of the man's face while talk-

ing to the natives, and a vague suspicion crossed his mind that Sloper had not rightly reported the speeches of the giant chief, though, of course, he had no means of verifying his suspicions.

"What do you think, Van Dam?" he asked the little Dutchman, as they stood by the door alone, the others having departed.

"I t'ink somebody one rogue, dat's vat I t'ink. I t'ink dere be one traitor in te ship, dat it is lucky we no been killed alreaty by de savages."

"A traitor?"

"Yah; but I can nicht told ye who he was been. I find him out, neffer mind, und break his headt."

"You suspect——"

"One, two, tree feller. Maybe it's one, maybe some other feller. I find him out sometime, and kill him quick."

Charlie took the precaution this time of putting the key of the padlock which secured the door into his pocket; so that if there was really any treachery about it would be harder work than before to leave the door open.

Whether there was treachery on foot or not, there was none that night, and when Charlie opened the door in the morning there was not a soul in sight, nor any trace of their visitors of a few hours before.

The young fellow went upon deck, but there was no one about, neither friends nor foes, the desolate expanse of snow and ice being unrelieved by a single human figure.

At breakfast Sloper said that the party had evidently gone back to the village to procure sledges and dogs, and that they would probably return in the course of the next day.

The absence of the terrible giants seemed to reassure the whites, and during the day they went out from time to time for exercise and air, Charlie and Mollie taking quite a walk late in the afternoon, Van Dam remaining behind to get supper, as well as to keep a lookout on the men he suspected.

The two had set out to return to the ship by a little different route than that by which they had come, the flag showing them the position of the ship, when as they descended a little hollow at about half the distance, they came suddenly upon two bodies lying upon the ice.

"Poor fellows," said Mollie, "they have been overcome by the cold."

"I fear it is something worse than that," cried Charlie, running forward.

As he came up his worst fears were realized, for he beheld the two men, late companions of his, lying dead upon the snow.

Not far away, behind a mass of ice, lay a broken spear stained with blood, while the marks of many footprints showed that the two unfortunate fellows had been set upon by quite a large party, evidently the very men whom Sloper had said were harmless.

"There has been foul murder done here!" cried Charlie excitedly. "Let us hasten, for I know not what may happen yet before our return."

Taking the young girl's hand, the lad hurried on across the ice, keeping the flag in sight, and at the same time looking out for danger ahead.

Half the remaining distance had been traversed when he came upon another scene of conflict, the body of one of the huge natives being stretched upon the snow, and near it three of Charlie's own companions, one of whom seemed still alive.

Kneeling by the poor fellow's side, the young man poured a few drops of spirits down his throat, and revived him sufficiently to learn what had happened.

They had been set upon by a small party of the natives, and though they fought with the utmost desperation, killing one and wounding several others of the enemy, they had been overpowered.

He had been left for dead, and would have soon expired

had not Charlie came up, and even now seemed very nearly exhausted.

The savages had been alone, he said, so that Charlie was still at a loss to know if there had really been treachery practiced by anyone of his own party, or if the savages had acted purely from their own evil instincts.

He was reluctant to leave the man alone, and did not until the latter had strongly urged him to do so, saying that he could not possibly live, and that he wished Charlie to return to the ship in order to save his own life.

The party had gone thither, he said, and it was therefore Charlie's duty to go to the rescue of his friends, or, at all events, to seek shelter from the fiends before they annihilated the whole party.

Charlie, therefore, hurried on, and as he reached the deck, drawing Mollie after him, came suddenly upon Van Dam fighting hand-to-hand with an enormous savage.

CHAPTER XI.

LOCKED IN THE ICE—A GREAT LOSS.

"It looks very much as if we were fastened in," remarked Phil, as he aroused his companions.

"Screwed in, you mean," added old Peggs. "Can't you knock the snow away?"

"There seems to be something in the way, and I am afraid that a mass of ice has become loosened and fallen across the entrance."

"We can't get down to it, at any rate," observed Diggs, after making a careful examination of the place. "We had a hole in the floor through which we crawled up in here, and now it's all as hard and level as a stone court."

"Not a nice place to do one's courtin' in, though," observed Stopps.

"You're wrong there," corrected Peggs. "It is an ice place, and just that."

"There must be a chance to get out," Phil said at that moment. "Suppose we try our axes?"

With that he took up one of those useful tools, and began trying the walls of their prison to find a soft spot, chipping off large slabs of crystal ice, but not seeming to get any nearer to the outside.

The floor had evidently changed from the time that they had entered this upper chamber, and either the berg had fallen partly over and wedged a mass of ice in the former entrance, or it had broken and made a new chamber while the party slept, the drifting snow being crowded in at the crevices, filling them up as closely as though the whole thing were one compact mass.

Whatever explanation could be offered, it was clear that they were locked fast in the ice, and that they must wait until something unusual happened, which would set them free once more.

The space which inclosed the party was about ten feet in height, and rather more than that in diameter, being very nearly circular, and having a greater height in the center than at the sides.

"It seems to make little difference where we cut," was Phil's declaration, as he began hacking away at the frozen walls once more, "so long as we get out; and, at any rate, we might as well enlarge our quarters."

Being protected from the wind, the place was not as cold as might have been expected; but, for all that, our friends did not care to take up their permanent residence there, and Stopps took the other ax and gallantly set to work by Phil's side.

All the effect the work seemed to be was the enlarging of the

inclosure, for the light was no better after a half hour's digging than it was before, the wall seeming to be just as thick.

"That's no sign, though," said Hudson, "for it may have snowed in the night. Let me have a whack at it for a spell."

He had his whack, as did all of them, an arched passage, three feet wide and six high, being cut in the ice to the depth of eight or ten feet by the time they concluded to stop work for breakfast.

"We'll peg away in this direction now, if it takes all day," said the cooper, as they sat down to their meal. "We're bound to get out some time, if we work long enough."

"It might be a mile thick," remarked the blacksmith. "I've heard of icebergs more'n that long, and putty high, too."

"That reminds me," observed Peggs, putting away a big chunk of meat, "of the time when me and Bill Perkins was stuck fast in a cave, and had to dig ourselves out with our shovels. Tell you what, that was a tough one."

"No tougher than your yarn, I guess," was the cook's rejoinder.

"You see, we was diggin' in a bankment, when about forty thousand tons of earth came pilin' down right in front of us, and closed up the hole, leaving us in a kind of cave with no way to get out 'cept by boring through the solid rock, and, of course, that wasn't to be thought of."

"We was all alone, and nobody within ten miles, so they wasn't any use of hollering, 'cause they wouldn't ha' heard us if we did, and, as a consequence, we was necessitated to dig our way out."

"Well, we began to dig, and we dug and dug and dug for two days and two nights in the direction as we thought was right, spellin' each other now and again when we got tired."

"Why, sir, we dug till we actooly wore the shovels clear down to the handles, and used up three pairs of boots apiece, crowding the dirt back behind us as we dug it out."

"The perspiration was so awful that our shirts rotted on our backs, and the sweat made a well in the dirt deep enough to drown ten mules, and did most like to drown one jackass, which was Bill Perkins."

"I didn't know but what it was you," gasped Diggs, and then, happening to open his mouth too wide in order to let out a laugh, down went his chew of tobacco, nearly strangling him before he could get it back again.

"Served ye right," declared Peggs. "Ye'd ought to know better than to chaw tobacker at meal time."

"Let's go to work again," said Phil, after a little, taking up an ax and going into the passage already cut.

He and Hudson were hard at work, having extended one gallery some two feet, when there came a sudden shock, followed by a splitting, crackling noise, the reports being as sharp as pistol shots.

"Look out for yourself!" cried Hudson, aiming a blow at the ice, and then dodging back, leaving the ax remaining where it had struck.

Both he and Phil darted back into the main inclosure as the ice began to fall all around them, the walls seeming to heave under some mysterious influence which they could not comprehend.

The others were greatly alarmed, for the commotion was greater here, and the ice was falling from the ceiling in great blocks which would have crushed out their lives, had any of the party been struck by them.

Suddenly there was a greater rocking than before, and they were all thrown down, the berg seeming to turn completely over, so great was the commotion, while a cloud of snow fell upon them from some point above their heads, and nearly buried them.

When they scrambled out, they found themselves in almost

total darkness, but safe, although they were still imprisoned in the ice, the inclosure being evidently larger than before.

Phil was supplied with a tinder-box, flint and steel, and he presently produced a light, in order to ascertain his position, and see what was the best course to pursue to get out.

By this light he found that the falling in had so wedged itself together as to form a kind of wedge-shape cell, in which he and his companions were imprisoned. The broad part of the wedge was at the bottom, which was covered to a considerable depth with the snow which had fallen in upon them.

"There is snow above us there," observed Phil after examining the place carefully, "and I think if we can dig it away we can release ourselves."

"It's just like a chimney," added Hudson, "and the snow is wedged in there; but when we get it down, how are we going to make our way out?"

"By cutting steps in the ice."

"Then suppose we begin now?" said Peggs, stumping about excitedly and seizing an ax.

He had made three or four blows, when the implement suddenly flew out of his hands and was lost, while he exclaimed:

"By the great horned ox! But I believe there's a snow bank here, and we can crawl out, and that reminds me—"

What it reminded him of was not known, for he suddenly slipped, his peg giving way beneath him, and shooting him head foremost into the wall.

He disappeared completely, but presently a flood of light entered the place, and his stentorian voice was heard outside, exclaiming:

"Come out here, you duffers, it's done snowing, and is as warm as—well, as warm as I don't know what—after being locked up in that place."

The party scrambled out through the hole that Peggs had unwittingly made, finding themselves on the main body of the ice, the waters of the bay still tossing and rolling, with here and there a berg floating slowly along.

"This is a pretty how d'ye do," growled Peggs, stumping along over the snow, his wooden leg making little holes as he walked. "Who in thunder knows where we are?"

"I'm sure I don't," replied Phil; "but we've got our compass yet, and we can easily lay our course from that."

He accordingly searched through his bundle, and finding the little box, carefully opened it, the others standing about with looks of expectancy upon their faces.

"By Jove, that's too bad!" he suddenly exclaimed, as he took off the outside cover.

"What's the matter?" they all exclaimed in a breath.

"The thing is broken!"

"Badly?" asked Hudson.

"Completely gone to smash! The needle won't work."

"Broken?"

"Yes; and the pivot is gone. I must have fallen on it when we upset, for it's ruined."

A casual glance showed him that the instrument was totally unfit for use, and with an expression of deep regret Phil restored it to his pocket, although there was nothing to be done with it, while Diggs said slowly:

"If we could see any of the old landmarks, we might make our way back, but they're all covered up with the snow."

"And the sun don't shine, either," added Stopps, "so we're at a stump."

"But I'm on one," muttered Peggs, "and it's all the time lettin' me down into the snow. If I only had two good legs now, I wouldn't ask no odds of nobody, but I'd find my way back as easy as nothin'."

"How would you do it, I'd like to know?" asked Diggs, opening his mouth.

"By the smell of whisky in Bill Brackett's mouth, that's

how; or the odor of those plugs of yours what you've strung up in your room."

By way of explanation, I would say that the worthy blacksmith had fastened all his tobacco rings together with bits of twine, and had them all suspended from a peg in his room, so as to keep a record of the number of plugs he had dug out in the voyage, that being his manner of measuring time.

"If you keep on telling such awful lies, Peter Peggs," he vociferated, "I'll have to chaw my almanac up before I get home, 'cause I won't have any whole plugs left. Twenty used to stand for a year, but I'll be cussed if I haven't strung up that many since I knowed you, and that ain't six months yet."

With a laugh that put them all in good spirits the five adventurers then set out upon their return to their ship, though whether they would ever reach it or not seemed extremely doubtful.

CHAPTER XII.

THINNING OUT—PHIL'S RETURN AND CHARLIE'S AGONY.

"By all that's bad, there's been treachery here beyond a doubt!" muttered Charlie, as he ran to the assistance of the plucky Hollander, who was fighting desperately for his life.

The steward had had a gun with him, and this was now lying upon the deck, having been wrenched from his hands evidently by the giant during the struggle.

This Charlie at once seized, and brought it down with full weight upon the savage's head, felling him to the deck in an instant.

At the same time Mollie uttered a piercing shriek, and turning quickly around, Charlie beheld her in the strong grasp of a second native, who had suddenly appeared from some hiding place, and was about to leap over the rail into the snow.

"Is the piece loaded?" cried Charlie to the steward.

"Yah, clear to the muzzle."

The lad instantly threw the gun to his shoulder, and drew aim at the monster's head, resolving to save the young lady at whatever risk.

As he was about to pull the trigger, however, the savage suddenly wheeled around and placed Mollie in front of him, and exposed directly to Charlie's fire.

The fierce creature evidently knew the deadly nature of the weapon raised against him, and took this means of protecting himself until he could get away with his prize.

Charlie's finger had already touched the trigger, however, and in another second the bullet would have sped upon its errand of death.

Van Dam was equal to the occasion, however, and he suddenly rushed upon the lad and threw aside his aim.

The bullet sped wide of its intended mark, and at the next moment the wily native leaped over the rail, uttering a fiendish laugh which fairly made one's blood run cold to hear.

Charlie rushed frantically to the rail, but the demoniac creature was speeding over the ice, carrying the unfortunate girl in his arms as lightly as though she had been but a child.

Charlie would have followed him at once, but at that moment Bill Brackett came out of the cabin with a knife in his hand, crying wildly:

"There's one more of the villainous critters disposed of! It's lucky there weren't any more of them."

"Where is Sloper?" demanded the young fellow, turning quickly upon Brackett.

"Here he is. What d'ye want of him?" replied that individual, coming on deck at that moment.

"Ah! you are here, are you?" asked Charlie. "You see how harmless these tender-hearted natives of yours are! More

than half of our band have been murdered, and the young lady carried off."

"These ain't the same fellers we saw last night, but another tribe altogether. They attacked us quite sudden like, and I had no suspicions of it."

"How many dead are there in the ship—of our own men, I mean?"

"Three, and two of the natives, besides this feller here with his head smashed in. He's no good for anything now, and we'd better chuck him on to a snow bank."

"Who are the dead below?"

"Blake and two others."

"Then all there are left are us four and Thompson; for the man I saw on the snow must be dead by this time."

"That's all there is, young feller," said Sloper; and Charlie thought he detected a tone of exultation in his voice.

"And no one can tell how soon we may go," said Charlie. "We may never see Phil and his party again; and here we are alone in this wilderness, with the Arctic winter coming on us."

"And night coming on into the bargain," remarked Brackett. "They ain't no twilight in these parts, and it'll be as dark as pitch in fifteen or twenty minutes."

"And a snowstorm coming up," was Sloper's cheerful addenda. "Better get in and make ourselves comfortable while we can."

"But Miss Mollie—we cannot abandon her in this heartless manner."

"What ye goin' to do about it?" asked Sloper. "Kin ye foller the man what run away with her?"

"He haf gone from sight," said Van Dam, "and te tarkness come down quick. We would be lost if we go after him now."

"But the snow is fallin'," added Bill Brackett.

"We'll have to wait till morning," was Sloper's advice, "and then, perhaps, the other fellers 'll come back, and bring your friend with 'em."

"There is nothing to be done, and yet it is maddening to have to submit to this delay," cried Charlie, in despair. "Let us go below and see to our friends."

Charlie and Van Dam went below, the two others remaining on deck, and when they were out of hearing Charlie said:

"How did these two men act in the late affair?"

"Dey fight like de dickens, only I been outside all de vile, nearly, and I not seen te whole of it."

"Do you suspect either of them of being a traitor?"

"Nein; de fight hard, and de pig fellers come in vile we peen all down in te cabin. Dey no could been pring 'em, dose vellers couldn't."

"It's very strange. Ah, there is Thompson! How do you feel, old man?"

A sailor had just entered the cabin from the forward part of the vessel, and it was to him that Charlie now put this question.

"Pretty well now," answered the man; "but I didn't a while ago, when one o' them fellers had his big paws on my wizen. 'Twas lucky Bill Brackett struck and made him let go."

"Did Brackett do that?"

"Yes, he did; but that friend of his'n, Saul Sloper, didn't do much else but holler and run about, but somehow the fellers didn't seem to touch him, or even try to."

"So—so, there is something at the bottom of this," thought Charlie. "I shall have to watch Saul Sloper, for he may be the traitor after all."

At that moment Saul was saying to Bill Brackett on the upper deck:

"You hadn't ought to have fixed that feller, Bill, for the others will find it out, and even my influence among 'em wouldn't save ye."

"I'd fix you just as quick if I thought I could get them

papers," was Bill's mental speech, though what he said to Sloper was rather more moderate.

"I couldn't help it," he said; "for Thompson was looking right at me, and I had a chance. He'd 've thought I was going back on the boys if I hadn't done it. Besides, no one seen me."

"Yes, they did. The feller that lugged off the gal seen ye. By the way, Bill, I'm goin' to have that gal, and when you get rid o' Phil we'll resky her from these fellers, and then go back to Bedford."

"And you was the feller that didn't know anything about them papers, and was afraid to go back for fear o' that old indictment," thought Bill. "I'll spot ye, Mr. Saul, and the minute I get out o' this yer wilderness, I'll have them papers, or I'm a goat."

"It's dark now, and beginnin' to snow," observed Saul, "and we'd better go below. Them natyves won't be back to-night, so ye needn't be scared, but ye'd better be careful how ye goes out alone after this. It mightn't be healthy."

"I understands," thought Bill. "Ye mean to set them donkey-eared fellers on me, so's to get the reward from Toby Coddling, and sell him the papers at yer own price. Just wait till I get you away from the Arctic, and ye'll see what I'll do with ye."

It was now quite dark, and the wind blowing in fitful gusts, scattering the lightly falling snow hither and thither, and making it very uncomfortable to remain on deck.

Below, Charlie had lighted up, and Van Dam was just setting the supper upon the table, there being many empty places, and it was not even certain that Phil would return.

Charlie, taking a torch, and accompanied by Thompson, went out upon the ice where the poor sailor had been left, but when they reached him he was already dead, a look of calmness and peace resting upon his pale face.

"We must leave him here," said the young man.

"The snow will be the best grave. I could not have been satisfied, though, had I not returned to look after him."

It was now snowing quite hard, but Van Dam had taken the precaution to hang a lantern over the side of the ship, and this guided the two comrades back to their home, as they now considered it.

After supper—a meal which they greatly relished, despite the sadness of the occasion—they sat around the stove for two or three hours before turning in for the night.

The next day was stormy, and they did not go out until noon, the snow having drifted in all about the doors, necessitating considerable digging before they could get on deck.

Late in the afternoon Charlie heard a shout, and running up the companionway, saw Phil and four of his companions approaching the vessel on a brisk run.

Behind them, at some little distance, were a score of the terrible giants who had made such sad havoc in their ranks, yelling and gesticulating in the wildest manner.

"Only five," murmured Charlie. "Alas! what assistance can we give them against those fiends? Destruction stares us in the face! Better had we all been crushed to death beneath the berg than to be murdered by these demons."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MEETING OF OLD FRIENDS—THE TRAITORS.

Phil and his party kept on at the same rate, and although the giants were pressing them hard, they managed to keep ahead of them until they reached the ship.

Charlie fired a shot at the pursuing demons, and then he and Van Dam helped Phil and his friends on deck.

They went below and made everything fast, and well it

was that they did, for in a few moments the enemy began thundering on the door and trying to gain an entrance.

"Where are all your men?" asked Phil. "Here are only Van Dam and Thompson and Brackett, besides yourself. I left more than that behind."

"Ask those fiends outside where they are," returned Charlie, sadly. "They can tell you."

"Have you, too, been attacked by them?"

"Yes, and this is all that remains. You also have lost some of your comrades."

"These savage wretches have killed all but us five. But Mollie?—I do not see her. I thought that she would come to meet me the first thing. Where is she?"

"Dear Phil, she—"

"Not dead?"

"No, but carried away by those fiends."

"Heaven help her then!" groaned Phil, burying his face in his hands. "Is there nothing but death and misfortune for us in this desolate region? I shall give up soon if there comes no ray of hope."

"Keep a stout heart, Phil. We are exposed to a common danger, and are at least friends."

Charlie darted a suspicious look at Sloper as he said this, but the man returned his glance unflinchingly, and replied, slowly:

"It ain't my fault if the natyves attacked us. I couldn't help it. These fellers belong to another tribe from the first ones we saw. It are just as much a surprise to me as it is to you."

The pounding on the door was still kept up, but after a little while it stopped, and Charlie, looking through the keyhole, reported that the men had gone, though of course he could not tell how far they had gone away, as they might be within close distance, and waiting for their victims to come out.

"Who is this man, Charlie?" asked Phil, now noticing Sloper for the first time.

"A man whom Brackett found and brought here. He has been wrecked like ourselves."

"When were you wrecked?" asked Phil, turning to Sloper.

"About three weeks ago. The other fellers all died from starvation, and I had liked to done the same."

"What was your vessel?"

"The North Star, out o' New York."

"Why, she was lost several years ago," said Phil; "three at least."

"I said three years."

"I understood you to say weeks."

"Perhaps I did, but I meant years," replied Sloper, somewhat embarrassed, and then he turned away to talk to Johnson.

After supper, Phil took Charlie to one side and said in a low tone:

"I don't like that fellow Sloper. Do you trust him?"

"Not very much. He has not shown any treachery, and yet I do not like him any better than you. He possesses some power over these fiends outside which I cannot understand, and I think that perhaps he is in league with them."

"But they make indiscriminate war upon all whites. Why should they make him an exception?"

"Because he has some influence over them which we do not know of," answered Charlie, and then he gave an account of everything that had occurred during Phil's absence, which threw considerable light upon matters which had before puzzled the lad.

"Watch this man," he said to his chum, "and keep your eye on Bill Brackett as well, for I was not altogether satisfied with him when I left, and from what you have told me I still have my suspicions of him."

"You are not going to do nothing in regard to Mollie?"

"Do nothing? Indeed I am not. On the contrary, I am going to do a great deal. We can do nothing to-night, however."

"To be sure, but as you did not say anything I thought it strange."

"To tell the truth, Charlie, I've been thinking it over, but have come to so little conclusion in the matter that I thought I had better wait until I could mature my plans before I divulged them. We are but a handful now, and we do not know for certain how many we can trust."

"Van Dam, and Thompson, and you and I—that makes four."

"And four more make eight; those are my companions."

"Which leaves Brackett and Sloper as the doubtful ones."

"Can you trust Thompson?"

"I have never suspected him of acting falsely, but then Brackett himself killed one of those giants, and yet I dare not trust him."

"Well, let us rejoin our companions, or those we suspect may become wary and discover the real state of our feelings."

The evening passed away without any demonstration upon the part of the enemy, but Phil was not to be lured into careless ways by this silence, and before they turned in he appointed the various watches for the night.

He instructed every man to exercise the utmost vigilance, and give instant warning of any suspicious occurrence.

The men were divided into three watches of three men each, with one exception, Phil counting himself into one watch, which made its number four, and these watches divided the eight between them, Phil choosing to take the middle period, as being one when the most was to be feared, not so much from foes outside as from traitors within.

The first watch was taken by Sloper, Peggs and Van Dam, Brackett being in Phil's watch, the young man taking pains not to have the two suspected ones on watch together.

Nothing occurred during the first watch, and then Phil took his turn, assisted by Brackett, Diggs and Thompson, Charlie Mercer having the last watch with Hudson and Stopps, both men who could be relied upon.

Everything was as still as death, and when the watch had half passed away Phil went into his own room for a few minutes to look over a chart which he had in some singular manner contrived to save, it being the only one in the ship.

At this moment Brackett slipped away, and meeting Sloper by appointment in a dark corner of the wreck, said, in a whisper:

"That 'ere feller Phil suspects us, and this is as good a time as any to have it out with him. I mean to earn that two hundred to-night."

"I'm with yer," answered the other, drawing a sharp knife, "and I'll let in my pets. They're asleep in the snow outside, and I kin soon wake 'em up."

"We can count on Thompson," added Brackett, "for he's tired of being bossed by a couple of boys, and will do what I say. It's too bad that them fellows of yours killed two or three of our best men."

"I couldn't help it, and you'd better look out for yourself, too, for they'll remember that you plugged one of 'em, and 'll pay you up for it."

"They didn't see me do it."

"One on 'em did, and he's away with the gal, but you kin bet that the others know of it."

"All right, Mr. Sloper," thought Bill. "I see your little game. You've got them papers, and want to have all the divvy to yerself. You'd better look out as well as me, as soon as we get out o' this hole I'll drive a knife through ye as sure as preachin'."

"Now's our time," whispered Sloper. "He's in his room. I'll lock him in, and that'll settle two, 'cause young Mercer is in there as well. Then I'll take the Dutchman, Thompson 'll take old wooden legs, and you kin go for the cook."

"And that leaves two only for us to take. You won't need to call the natives in."

"Maybe not and maybe yes. Are you all ready?"

"Yes."

"Then go, and Satan take the young cubs!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A TERRIBLE ENCOUNTER—RESOLUTIONS.

Phil was in his room, poring over the chart, Charlie Mercer being fast asleep in one of the bunks, when he suddenly heard a shrill whistle and a rush of feet toward his door.

Fearing danger, he took one stride forward and reached the door.

At the very instant it was slammed shut and locked upon the outside, while a mocking laugh was heard.

"Stay in there, sonny, until I tell ye to come out," said Sloper, and then Phil heard the sound of blows and a scream of agony from Van Dam.

"Mein Gott, I vas kilt," cried the Hollander, and then the sound of some heavy body falling to the deck struck upon Phil's ear.

Rushing to where Charlie lay asleep, he shook him roughly and cried:

"Rouse, rouse, for God's sake! There is murder going on."

Then came a frightful noise in the passages outside, groans and shouts sounding in terrible confusion, the voices of Brackett and Sloper being heard above all the rest.

Charlie quickly sprang up and put on his outer clothing and boots as Phil ran to the door and put his shoulder against it.

"Hurry up, give me a lift here!" cried the lad, and then he and Charlie fell against the door and broke it from its fastenings.

In the passage lay the body of the steward, while not far away was Stopps, the cook, resting on one knee, endeavoring vainly to stanch the crimson flood which gushed from a wound in his side.

"There has been treachery here," he cried, seeing the two lads. "Thompson and Brackett have joined that stranger, and he has let those fiends in upon us."

His words were too true, for at that very instant one of the giants came bounding toward Phil, a look of deadly hate in his hideous face and his blood-shot eyes glowing with demoniac fury.

Phil was unarmed, but not far away lay an iron crowbar of great weight, used for doing the heaviest kind of work.

Seizing this as though it had been but a twig, despair adding strength to his arms, he met the giant's assault bravely, and dealt him a blow across the arm which paralyzed it.

Then swinging his ponderous weapon about his head, he literally threw himself upon the giant, the bar carrying him forward with the utmost impetuosity.

Crash!

Thud!

And with a frightful groan the monster sank to the deck.

"Good!" cried Hudson, rushing up at this moment as a second giant flew towards Phil.

Hudson had a harpoon in his hands, and settling back upon his haunches, he poised the weapon just as the monster rushed impetuously forward.

The giant was literally impaled upon the sharp point of the

harpoon, and fell in an unconscious mass, the pole of the weapon breaking off short, leaving the iron imbedded to the depth of six inches in the savage being's body.

Charlie had in the meantime closed and barred the door, thus preventing any others from coming in, the valiant Peggs having knocked out one of the giants with no other weapon than his wooden leg.

"Say I ain't any good, will ye?" he cried. "Wooden leg or no wooden leg, I ain't forgotten how to fight yet."

Thompson had found it a harder job to do for Peggs than he had imagined, and after the first assault he had been obliged to fly for his own life.

His treachery had met with its just reward, for one of the savages, whom Sloper had just let in, mistaking him for an enemy, had run him through the body, and let out his base life in a twinkling.

The savages were now prevented from entering, and those that had effected an entrance were dead or dying. So that there was nothing to fear from them for the moment.

Sloper and Brackett, too, were alone now, and against them were arrayed five angry men, for Diggs, though wounded, was still able to fight, and Peggs was a perfect host in himself, despite his loss of a limb.

"Now, traitors!" hissed Phil, when there came a lull in the combat, "since you prefer those demons outside of our company, go and live with them."

"Kill 'em!" cried Hudson. "They deserve the wust death we can give 'em."

And then he seized a musket, quickly loaded it, and throwing it to his shoulder, fired point blank at the two traitors.

One of them would certainly have met his death in another second had not Phil dashed the enraged sailor's weapon aside at the very moment he pulled the trigger, causing the bullet to flatten itself against the beams overhead.

"What did you do that for, captain?" asked Hudson, letting the musket fall.

"There must be no more bloodshed!" cried Phil. "We outnumber these wretches, and could kill them where they stand, did we but choose. They cannot live with us in peace, therefore they must depart."

"It'll be certain death for one of 'em," muttered Hudson, "but the other is in league with the fiends without, and'll be safe. Better keep him a prisoner, captain."

"And let him feed on our scanty supplies? No, indeed! We have no use for him whatever, and he must go; no matter what becomes of him!"

"We can't trust them other fellers," whispered Sloper to Brackett. "I know another way out, so follow me."

Then darting suddenly down a dark passage, followed by Brackett, he reached what had been the fore peak, and dashing aside a mass of canvas and clambering over a pile of rubbish, he made his way out into a tunnel which his giant allies had already excavated, and thence issued upon the deck.

Hudson, Diggs, Charlie and Peggs hastily followed the retreating forms, and thus discovered the opening which they had never before dreamed of.

There was one door which could be closed, however, and this Phil ordered to be strongly barricaded, so that they might not be in danger of any further visits from the traitors and their savage confederates.

When this was done, Phil turned to his four comrades and said:

"We are now but a handful of human beings, exposed to a common danger at the hands of creatures whom we may call fiends; and it is of the utmost importance that we stand firmly by one another. I give you my word that I will fight for you as long as my arm retains its strength, or my heart throbs."

"I can say nothing to make my own case any stronger," added Charlie; "and I will stick to Phil and the rest of you as long as I have breath."

"Same way here," spoke up Hudson, his breast heaving with emotion; "and I know, and we all know, what Peggs and Diggs can do when it comes to a fight."

"Count on us, boys," said both men, in a breath, and then Phil shook hands with all, and said, fervently:

"I thank you heartily for this assurance of your friendship, and believe me when I say that it was not needed, for I have learned to trust you, every one, and would sooner doubt myself than think you capable of treachery or deceit."

Then turning away sadly, the unbidden tears staring to his eyes, he said gravely:

"Our two friends must be cared for, and these terrible evidences of a frightful struggle be removed. Take the two bodies to my room, men, while Charlie and I put things to rights."

The bodies of the cook and steward were taken to Phil's room and decently laid out, those of the traitor Thompson and the dead savages being placed to one side, while the two lads made order out of the confusion which everywhere reigned.

When all had been done that could be the little party gathered around the stove in the common sitting room and discussed plans for the future, every one having some good ideas which only needed putting together to form a feasible plan for their future conduct.

"My idea is, first, that we must rescue Miss Mollie from these creatures," said Phil. "It seems incredible that they would kill her, and she must therefore be found and brought back."

"And I don't know that there is any more danger, except from the cold, out on the ice, than there is here," added Charlie. "We are all armed, and there are guns and ammunition enough for the whole of us. Let us then set out in the morning, for the young lady cannot be far away by this time, seeing that the savages have remained in this neighborhood."

"I'm with you, there," was Hudson's remark, "and we'd better shut up the ship and keep together, for we want all the men that we can get."

"Count me in, wooden leg and all," said Peggs, "I've stumped around here before, and I can do it again."

"And I'll fight for all I'm worth," put in Diggs, "for I don't want any harm to come to that young woman, for Phil's sake."

"Then we are all agreed," said Phil, "and as soon as morning breaks we'll be off."

CHAPTER XV.

THE TWO TRAITORS IN POSSESSION.

"Well, Saul, we're in a pretty fix, ain't we?"

"'Tain't very pleasant, for a fack."

"And it's all your fault."

"Things didn't go right."

"I should say they didn't."

"That Thompson was no good."

"He was good enough, but that friend of yours was too much for him."

"Well, you needn't be afraid of 'em now."

"No, for they've deserted us. Where's your influence over 'em now?"

"Gone a beggin'. Max and the rest have got tired o' me, and while they won't molest me nor mine any more, they have shook off my authority."

"And now you ain't any better off than the other fellers, for Max won't gie ye the gal, and you're just as likely to freeze to death as Phil and his gang."

"Not a bit of it."

"How so?"

"Because I know where there's a cave chuck full o' supplies, and a warm spring flowing out of the middle of it day and night. Thar we can stay till the winter's over, and then start home."

"And Bedford?" asked Bill.

"How can I go to Bedford with that indictment hanging over my head?"

"Now look here, Saul, let's have an understandin'."

"Well?"

"The man you killed had some papers. You took 'em, and Toby Coddling wants them. It ain't likely that he's going to bother you with that old indictment when you've got them papers."

"How d'ye know I've got 'em?"

"Well, I know, and that's enough. The man you killed was Phil Gleason's father. The boy didn't know it himself, but Toby did."

"How'd ye find that out?"

"I knowed things that would send Toby to jail or the gal-lows, for some time, and this is one of 'em. I know that he'd 've killed the man if you hadn't, so's to get the papers."

"Quite likely."

"I know it, 'cause I was passin' when he come flying out, cursing his ill-luck."

"Yes, I reckon he wants 'em bad."

"And what's to prevent our getting a good price for 'em? He can't prove the murder on ye, 'cause the man's body was never found. It's only supposed you killed him."

"I left his dead body lyin' on the floor when I sloped, hearin' noises."

And it was never found. You didn't know that, 'cause you dusted right away, but I did."

"Why didn't you tell me this afore, Bill?"

"'Cause I didn't think of it. Now, we've got to go some-where, and we might as well go back to New Bedford, and come into a fortune, as to loaf around the world as poor as Job's turkey."

"Ye don't know the natur' o' them papers, do ye, Bill?"

"No; do you?"

"They concern some property what belongs to Phil. If he dies and the papers ain't found, it all goes to the Sailors' Home, every bit of it."

"And if they are found?"

"These papers contains a will, an old one, which leaves the stuff, in the event of Phil's dying afore he comes of age, to—someone else."

"Who is it?"

"I dunno, but it's someone that Toby Coddling has got a interest in."

"You're lyin' ag'in," thought Bill. "You know as well as you please who it is, and ye've got the papers."

"As long as it ain't sure whether the man I slugged is dead or not," continued Bill, "I don't mind going back, but I tell ye I ain't got the papers."

"That won't do, Saul. I know you've got em."

Saul laughed, and Bill was more than ever confirmed in his belief that the much desired documents were in the man's possession.

The two plotters were conversing in a sort of ice hut, about a quarter of a mile from the ship, and the time was early morning.

The savages under Max—short for Maximus, a name given him by Sloper on account of his great size—had, indeed, abandoned the two villains, and they were now left alone.

The strange creatures had now been gone for three or four hours, and the two friends, left alone in the frozen wilderness, were forced to the dismal conclusion that they must now shift for themselves, as neither Phil and his party, nor Max and his giants, could be ranked among their friends.

Bill Brackett had formed a resolution which nothing could shake, and which was well worthy of his treacherous nature.

This was to kill his companion as soon as they were clear of their dangers, and there were any chances, no matter how remote, of his reaching civilized parts again; and anyone that knew the man would be certain that he would carry out his resolution or perish in the endeavor.

The two sat together for two or three hours longer, being well protected from the cold, when Sloper took a sudden fancy to go outside and see what was up, as he expressed it.

Scarcely had he done so, when he dropped upon his hands and knees, and said, in a hoarse whisper:

"Stay where you are, Bill. Them fellers in the ship have left it, and are follerin' the naytives' trail."

"The deuce they are!"

"Yes, and they've buried the bodies o' the fellers what was killed, leavin' the dead Injuns, or whatever else they are, out on the bare ice."

"Are they all goin'?"

"Yes, I reckon so, for they's five on 'em and three mounds. Reckon they dassen't leave anybody behind."

Brackett now crawled to the entrance of the hut, and he and Sloper watched the little party making its way across the ice in the direction taken by the savages.

The trail was still distinct, the wind not having yet effaced it entirely, and the travelers made rapid headway, trudging on manfully over the frozen surface, and occasionally cheering their dreary path with words of comfort, the sound of their own voices coming occasionally quite clear to the ears of the two men in hiding.

They watched the party quite out of sight, and, after some little time had elapsed, crept forth cautiously and made their way towards the lone wreck.

"The old Harpoon has been my home afore, and I reckon it will be ag'in," muttered the former second mate. "It'll be more comfortable than living in a cave, and as possession is nine p'int's we can have it all to ourselves, and if those fellows ever come back they can whistle for it."

The two rascals found some trouble in forcing an entrance to the inside of the wreck, but they succeeded at last, and then proceeded to make themselves comfortable, while poor Phil and his comrades were wending their dreary way over the ice in search of the captive maiden.

CHAPTER XVI.

PEGGS FINDS A QUEER SLEEPING PLACE.

Night came, and the five companions had not reached their journey's end, the trail being still plain, however.

It would be impossible to follow it in the night, however, and it was therefore expedient to find shelter before the darkness settled down upon them.

Peggs was the first to discover a place where they could remain for the night, and his manner of discovery was a singular one.

He was stumping about as usual, muttering to himself, when that treacherous leg of his suddenly gave way beneath him, and down he went up to his middle.

"Hi! hi! Pick me up and put me on my pins," he cried, and his friends ran to his assistance.

Before they could reach him, however, he sank deeper and deeper, and, as the others came up, suddenly disappeared en-

tirely from sight, leaving only a round hole in the snow to show which way he had gone.

"Where the mischief is he now?" asked Diggs. "Davy Jones has got him for sure this time. I hope that'll be a warning to him for having told such monstrous lies."

"I say there!" sounded a voice from out of the depths. "Come down here; it's a tip-top place to spend the night in. Jump right down; you can't hurt yourselves."

"Is that you, Peggs?" asked the blacksmith.

"Of course it's me," came the answer back out of the hole in the snow. "Who in the name of the North Pole did you think it was?"

"What sort of a place is it down there?" asked Phil.

"It's an ice house."

"Did you say a nice house?" inquired Diggs.

"No; I said an ice house, a house built of ice, you hump-backed crocodile. I stepped in through the skylight, 'cause the front door was locked."

"Can't you get out?" asked Charlie.

"To be sure I can, but I'm going to stay here now until morning. Come along down."

Diggs, approaching the hole in order to get a look at Peggs, stepped upon a mass of loose ice and snow combined, which gave way beneath him and shot him down the "skylight" before he could wink.

His legs flew out at an angle of forty-five degrees from his body, and he landed plump upon Peggs' shoulders, one leg upon either side of his head, like a pair of giant compasses.

It is needless to say that the astonished Peggs was instantly floored, but quickly recovering himself, he unscrewed that leg of his in a jiffy, and drummed away upon the back door of the blacksmith's trousers, until the worthy man was glad to cry quits and beg off.

"Don't you come down here straddlin' my neck in that way ag'in then!" snorted Peggs, restoring his wooden leg to its usual place. "I don't want to be garroted with nobody's legs, I don't."

"What are you two harlequins up to, down there?" asked Charlie Mercer, with a laugh, cautiously peering down the hole.

"Up to mischief, I'll be bound!" put in Hudson.

"Or snuff, more like," added Phil. "Is it safe to jump, Peggs?"

"Yes; but tell me when you're coming, 'cause I don't want to be a cushion for anyone else to light on. That sort of thing is played out."

"Here goes, then," cried Phil, "so look out for yourself."

With that he sprang for the edge of the opening, so that he would slide gracefully, the snow upon which he landed giving way under him and letting him down easy.

Charlie Mercer and Hudson followed suit, and then all hands began to look around them and examine their quarters for the night.

They found themselves in quite a commodious hut, built of blocks of ice and dome-shaped like the igloos of the Esquimaux, a hole being left at the top for the smoke and foul air to escape.

This had been covered by the drifting snow, and was unnoticed by Peggs as he stumped about until he discovered it in the manner already described.

The first thing that Phil did when he got inside was to find the opening of the long, low passage at one side of the hut, and having burrowed through this and the outside snow, he and his companions went above and patched the hole in the roof.

This was done by simply making a huge snowball and rolling it into the hole, which it filled nicely.

They then packed the snow all around the sides of the ball, making all firm and solid, after which they went below once more, and entered the hut by the regular passage.

They then partook of their evening meal, after which they spent a couple of hours in pleasant conversation, and finally wrapping themselves up in their fur coats and blankets, dropped off to sleep.

The hut was warm, though the air was none of the best, the ventilation being defective, as it must of necessity be in such a place, but this was a minor discomfort, and did not interfere with the rest of the castaways.

Nothing disturbed them during the night, their repose being as though they had been at home surrounded by all the comforts to which they had been used to.

This was owing in a great measure to their having always been able to adapt themselves to circumstances, which goes a good way in this world, and which they felt, notwithstanding the danger of their meeting with their former foes, the giants of the north.

These terrible foes failed to put in an appearance, however, from some reason or other, and not the slightest incident occurred to disturb their slumbers, Old Peggs snoring away as though he had never left the ship, Diggs assisting him from time to time with a sudden shrill snort, which served, as it were, to point off the notes of his companions' more heavy and sonorous nasal music.

Shortly after daybreak Phil awoke and aroused his companions, the question of breakfast being the first to be brought before the meeting.

"Come," said Phil, after the meal was finished, "we've rested long enough. Now, to resume our journey, and rescue that helpless girl from her savage foes."

CHAPTER XVII.

MOLLIE MEETS WITH FRIENDS AMONG A STRANGE PEOPLE.

Mollie's giant captor hurried swiftly away over the ice, bearing his unconscious burden in his arms, the poor girl having fainted from fright at the moment of her seizure.

Swiftly he sped away, followed by a small number of his comrades, and, before long, the wreck of the Harpoon was left far behind in the distance, the red flag floating from the stump of a mast being the only thing which gave evidence of its presence amid that dreary waste.

The giant seemed to fairly possess wings, so rapidly did he make his way over the glittering surface, the girl being but as a feather's weight in his huge arms.

He never looked back, but raced on as though driven by the fierce north wind, the only fitting representative of his own terrible self, and soon the red flag flying from the wreck was but an indistinct speck upon the dreary scene.

Poor Mollie remained senseless during this rapid journey over the ice, and when she recovered herself it was to discover that she was lying upon a couch of soft furs in some strange place, the walls of which were hung with the same material.

As she lay there, wondering where she was, and what would become of her, a woman entered, bearing in her hands an earthen dish which contained something which gave forth a very pleasant odor.

The woman was of medium height only, and though remarkably plain looking, was not hideous, and wore a pleasant expression on her face.

She smiled, indeed, when she saw that Mollie had recovered, and setting the dish down upon a low tripod close to the couch, invited Mollie to eat, the poor creature understanding her signs rather than the unintelligible sounds she uttered.

The poor captive felt no inclination to eat, and she turned away from the food with a certain loathing, not because it was unpalatable, but because of her distaste for anything at such a time.

The woman evidently understood the real state of the case, for, removing the food to a little distance, she sat down by the maiden's side, and taking one hand in hers, gently smoothed Mollie's forehead.

At the same time she uttered something, which Mollie could not understand, in a peculiarly soothing tone, which went far to assure the girl that she would meet with no harm while among these strange people.

By degrees the woman induced the captive to partake of the nourishing food which she had brought, and Mollie, although she did not know of what it was composed, found it quite savory and toothsome.

The wretched girl was miserable despite all the efforts made to cheer her up, for she could not but keep thinking of Phil and speculating upon his probable fate.

She had learned to love the handsome young fellow even more than she knew, and now that she was separated from him, and knew not what perils he might be undertaking for her sake, it made her inexpressibly sad to be away from him.

Her father, too, she knew nothing of—knew not whether he were alive or dead, and this uncertainty added another pang to her sorrow, until it seemed as though the burden were more than she could bear.

She would talk to herself in the hope that the sound of her own voice would give her companionship and relieve the dull monotony of her life.

She was thus occupied, when her companion entered unobserved.

The woman listened to the unusual sounds with the utmost attention, a look of intelligence suddenly crossing her swarthy face.

Presently Mollie became aware of her presence and ceased, a blush passing over her lovely face, for she had been speaking Phil's name when becoming aware that she was not alone, and although she knew that the woman could not understand her, her innate sense of modesty made her blush to the roots of her hair.

The native woman embraced her tenderly and then, uttering some musical, though perfectly unintelligible sounds, she suddenly disappeared from the place.

In a few moments she returned to Mollie, bringing with her a man, one of the giants, and made signs to the young girl to speak again.

"What can this mean?" thought Mollie, aloud. "Is it possible that there are any among these rude people who can understand me? What joy it would be to converse with some one, even though it were one of these savages."

Both the man and woman listened attentively while the young girl was speaking, the giant uttering a grunt now and then, and smiling in a manner that, if anything, increased his fierceness of countenance.

"Good Heaven!" cried Mollie, a sudden thought crossing her mind; "can it be possible that Phil has been taken by these people, and they, hearing him speak, have detected that my words and his are in the same language?"

"Would to Heaven that it might be so," she continued after a pause, and then suddenly thrusting her hand into her bosom and producing a picture of Phil, which the boy had himself given her just before setting out upon his exploring trip, she showed it to the woman.

She knew that the latter was intelligent in her rude way, and that if she had seen Phil she would be certain to recognize the portrait.

The woman and the man both gazed eagerly at the portrait,

being puzzled by it, and yet seeming to understand Mollie's inquiring look.

Then the woman spoke in an excited tone to the man and rattled off something in the most voluble manner, now pointing to the portrait, now to Mollie, and then to the couch upon which the young captive was wont to sit.

Suddenly a new thought burst upon the girl, and with a rapid movement she produced another picture and held it before the two singular creatures.

They both uttered a simultaneous exclamation of surprise and instantly left the room.

It was not long before the hangings at one end were swept aside, the woman entering, followed by some one, not one of the savages, but one whom Mollie knew and loved.

She knew the step, she knew by intuition who the new-comer was, and with a glad cry she leaped into the arms of the person now entering, and cried in accents which revealed the depth of love and affection in her heart:

"Father! Thank Heaven!—alive and well!"

It was indeed Mr. Maynard whom the woman had brought in, and it was his portrait which Mollie had last shown her strange friend.

"Mollie—my own dear little Mollie!" cried Maynard, his voice utterly breaking down and the tears streaming from his eyes as he clasped his daughter to his heart in a fond embrace.

"Father, this is joy indeed!" murmured the happy girl, returning her father's caresses. "But tell me, how came you among these people? I thought they spared none."

"It's a long story, and a sad one. Do not ask me to tell it now, my child, for I can talk of nothing else but that I have found you, whom I thought dead. This is joy indeed! and death now would have no pangs for me, having been blessed with one more sight of your sweet face."

CHAPTER XVIII.

REUNITED—DISASTER IN SIGHT OF HOME.

For some moments after this the father and daughter, so strangely reunited, spoke not a word, but sat locked in a loving embrace upon the couch of furs, content to look once more in one another's faces, and read the love which no words could express.

With the discretion of a more intelligent being, the woman withdrew, leaving the father and daughter alone, though they noticed it not.

At last Mollie spoke, her love for Phil making itself heard at last.

"Father," she asked, "have you seen Phil?"

"Seen Phil, my child? No, indeed. I have seen no one. Was he, too, captured?"

"I do not know, but I feared that he had been. These giants attacked the wreck, and I was carried away. Phil had not returned, and I did not know but what he had been taken."

"I have not seen him. I, of all the party which first went out, alone remain."

"Phil found several bodies, but could recognize none of them."

"The poor captain was the first to perish, not from the attack of these demons, but from the cruel cold. It was indeed bitter, and I do not know how I managed to escape, unless my temperate habits gave me the advantage."

"But all the men did not die of cold?"

"No. Some died from wounds received at the hands of these giants. In all my life I never saw such inhuman,

blood-thirsty demons. They seem to fairly revel in cruelty. The very sight of a white man is enough to turn them mad."

"And yet you were spared?"

"Yes; and I owe my deliverance to a very singular circumstance. During the fight, which at once ensued upon our coming suddenly upon a party of these strange beings, the like of which I had never before seen, my watch fell out of my pocket upon the snow, the case flying open, though otherwise uninjured.

"One of the giants picked it up—attracted, no doubt, by the glitter of the gold—and closely examined it, the others crowding around him like a lot of children, the utmost curiosity being depicted upon their hideous faces.

"The fight ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and one or two of our men, who still survived—the loss having been most frightful—took this opportunity to make their escape.

"Knowing that my life depended upon my courage and coolness, I walked boldly up to the savage who had my watch, took it away from him, closed it, and suddenly held it up to his ear.

"He was greatly surprised, and then I set the alarm off, moved the hands backward and forward, and showed him the works, in much the same manner that I would amuse a child."

"The crystal seemed to puzzle them greatly, for they could see the hands, and in endeavoring to move them would suddenly find their fingers stopped by some strange substance, which they could feel and yet not see.

"To make a long story short, that fine watch of mine, with all its different attachments, saved my life, for these people seemed to regard me as a god and did me no harm, though they pursued my hapless comrades and slew them before my eyes.

I have been a prisoner here for some time now, and have endeavored to learn the language of these creatures, which seems not to be difficult to acquire, sounding somewhat like the Russian, and something also like other northern languages."

There was considerable more concerning this strange people which Maynard told Mollie, but as it would be rather dry reading, and as this is merely the recital of the adventures of our friends in the north, and not an ethnological treatise, I have seen proper to omit a great deal of this information, except such as is really important, and shall proceed at once with my narrative.

In the course of another day Maynard came hurriedly to his daughter, and explaining that the giants had become alarmed about the presence of their captive, said that they were to be set free at once.

"But where shall we go?"

"We must return to the ship. Max tells me of a man, a white, who has been in this country for some time, and latterly with the party on the ship, and he it is who has told them strange stories, and given them warnings against retaining you."

"Can it be Sloper? He has had some control over them."

"I do not know, but I am certain that it would not be wise to remain longer with them."

"But we can never find our way back. We shall be frozen to death."

"The woman has offered to guide us part of the way."

"Then let us set out at once."

In the afternoon, therefore, the father and daughter, accompanied by the woman, who was of high rank among these odd people, besides half a dozen of the giants, set out over the snow for the ship.

At night they bivouacked under the snow, Mollie being made comfortable despite the strange surroundings, and in the morning the march was again resumed.

Late that day the party came suddenly in sight of another

party—five white men, evidently, the sight of whom seemed greatly to incense the giants.

The woman now showed her strength of character, and in a speech full of fire and passion commanded her followers to lay down their arms and offer the new-comers no resistance.

Then she advanced rapidly toward them, accompanied only by Mollie and her father, the latter holding aloft a spear to which his white handkerchief was attached.

The other party halted, evidently prepared to make a desperate resistance, but suddenly the leader uttered a glad shout and rushed forward, his comrades following at a less rapid pace.

It was Phil, and he had recognized Mollie, though who the others were he neither knew nor cared.

As he came nearer, however, he recognized Maynard, and shouted loudly to the others to come up, for it was all right, and they were among friends.

The joy of the meeting between the two young people can be better imagined than described, and so I will not attempt the narration.

Phil was overjoyed to see Mollie again, and Maynard's being alive and well caused him the utmost surprise and a joy only second to that of finding Mollie.

The party immediately started to return, the native woman keeping her followers in check until the whites had disappeared in the distance.

We will not trace the return journey, which, though exciting, had nothing of real danger in it, but will proceed at once to the time when the welcome signal floating from the wreck broke upon the sight of our travelers.

They were within a quarter of a mile of their former home, when suddenly a bright flame burst up all around it, there was a deafening explosion, and the whole air was filled with burned and blackened fragments, which fell in a shower upon the snow, even to their very feet.

CHAPTER XIX.

A TERRIBLE LOSS—HOPEFULNESS.

"My God! the wreck has been blown up!" cried Phil. "We are homeless in the midst of this frightful desert."

"Who could have done so black-hearted an act as this?" asked Charlie, with blanched face and trembling lips.

"No one but a fiend in human form," answered Hudson.

"Did you leave any one upon the wreck?" asked Maynard.

"No; we had no one to leave. This is all of our party."

"But who could be so cruel, so diabolically hateful as to do such a wicked thing as this?"

"Look there!" spoke up Charlie, suddenly, pointing to a spot at some little distance.

Two dark figures were seen hurrying across the ice in a direction which would take them away from our party, and even as Charlie spoke, one of them was seen to raise his arm aloft and shake his fist in defiance, while a mocking laugh came faintly toward them, borne by the brisk wind.

"It is Brackett!" cried Phil.

"And Saul Sloper," added Charlie. "They have forced their way into the wreck, and it is to them that we owe this disaster."

"There is nothing left of it now," said Phil, sadly; "nothing but a few twisted and charred timbers."

"And even those won't last long," interposed Peggs, "for look, the fire has broken out among 'em, and this wind will only fan the flames."

"Too true," added Maynard, gravely. "Our home is gone, and we are lost in the ice, indeed."

"The ship wouldn't matter so much," replied Hudson, "but we have no supplies."

"Except what we have with us," returned Diggs.

"This is indeed a hardship which we can hardly understand," spoke Charlie Mercer.

"Better to have remained captives among these barbarous people," was Maynard's comment.

"Do not despair," said Mollie, an expression of trustfulness crossing her face, "for He who has spared us thus far, will find us a way out of all our troubles."

"Would that I could think so," returned Maynard; while Charlie added:

"It's the worst misfortune that has befallen us yet, and I don't see how we are going to get over it."

"It isn't a question of a few days," said Hudson, "but of long, dreary months. Here it is November, and in a couple of weeks we shall lose the sun entirely, and have more bitter weather than any what we've yet seen."

"It's sure death without a roof over our heads," put in Peggs. "I'd give my wooden leg to be back in Bedford again."

"There's no use in standing here and bemoaning our lot," now said Phil. "Let us go forward and try to make the best of it. These villains have done us a terrible wrong, to be sure, but we are not dead yet, and there is no reason why we should be. There must be a way out of our troubles, and I am going to find it."

"At any rate, they're just as bad off as we," said Peggs.

"I don't know about that," retorted Hudson, as they once more resumed their march.

"Why not?"

"Because they are not such fools as to destroy the vessel without first having found a dwelling place for themselves."

"True."

"They could have held it against us for some time if they chose, but they have destroyed it, which goes to show that they have found some other habitation, otherwise they would never have abandoned this 'un."

"You may be right," said Charlie.

"Of course he's right," said Phil, heartily, "and I am surprised that I did not think of this side of the question before."

Nothing more was said until the wreck was reached, but here the sight that greeted them was not calculated to induce pleasant thoughts.

What the ice had spared, the explosion had destroyed, for, besides the ribs and heavier timbers, there was nothing left which would be of any use except for firewood.

Some of the deck planks could be used, but the trouble was that the debris was now on fire, and what did remain was threatened with destruction.

"Was there gunpowder in the hold?" asked Hudson.

"Yes, one or two small kegs, but I did not suppose they could cause so much trouble. This is a terrible loss, and one which we may not get over."

"We can prevent the fire from spreading," remarked Charlie, explaining his remark by throwing loose snow upon the flames nearest to him.

All hands followed his example, thus gaining upon the flames, as after they had once got near to the pile they could drag away loose timbers from it and roll them in the snow.

Much was saved in this manner, those who had axes plying them vigorously and cutting away portions of the wreck before the flames could reach them.

There was a good deal in what had been the midship portion which could be saved, and it was very evident that the fire had been started some time before the explosion took place.

Thin partitions, doors, bunk boards and slats, tables, stools

and chairs, and much other light stuff had evidently been piled amidships and then fired; for every little light material was found anywhere else but just here, showing that this supposition was evidently the correct one.

The six men worked with a will, but it was nearly impossible for them to put the central fire out, their chief efforts being to prevent its spreading any further, by banking it all around with snow.

The trouble was, that the melting snow raised great clouds of steam, which blinded, and in some cases badly scalded them, it being dangerous to approach too near the pile of burning rubbish.

By degrees they encroached upon the limits of the burning pile, and as it had nothing else to feed upon it gradually died out of necessity, leaving nothing but a glowing mass of coals amid the ice.

By throwing more snow upon it the homeless wanderers soon put it entirely out, after which they scattered the debris and began to consult together as to how they could best construct a house out of the ruins.

"That does not trouble me so much," observed Phil, "as the question of how we are going to obtain food, for besides what we have in our packs there is nothing, and here are seven persons obliged to remain here for five months at least, with provisions to last scarcely a week. It is a black outlook, my friends, for I see no way out of our troubles. However, we are in the hands of Providence, and must submit to fate, trusting for the best."

CHAPTER XX.

BUILDING A HOUSE—THE SEAL HUNT.

The night was passed under the snow, and in the morning all hands set to work with axes and bars to put the material for a house in shape.

First a circular trench was dug in the snow, leaving a space in the center of about twelve or fifteen feet in diameter.

Into the trench were laid two or three of the ribs of the vessel, placed upon their sides, to serve as a foundation, the snow inside being packed down hard and firm.

Another row was placed on top of these, the interstices being filled in with snow, and the side then built up with boards, planks and splinters, the dome shape being preserved by rounding off the sides with snow and ice as the building progressed.

A quarter section of the inside was partitioned off for the use of Mollie, a space being also left for a doorway, which would be approached by a long, low passage as in the igloos of the Esquimaux, in order to prevent direct contact with the cold outer air.

It must not be supposed that the building of the hut, rude and small though it was, occupied one day, or even two, it being fully four days before it was completed.

When the house was at last completed, and everybody was made snug and comfortable, Mollie's quarters being much better than one would suppose, having a separate entrance especially designed and built by Phil, the young leader said to his friends:

"Now we must fill our larder. These two villains, to whom we owe the destruction of the ship, beyond a doubt, are probably snugly ensconced somewhere hereabouts, provided with more than they will want for the winter."

"Then we'd better go and turn 'em out," suggested Hudson.

"It would be no more than serving them right," said Charlie Mercer. "They had no pity on us, and I don't see why we should consider them."

"No, no, we must do nothing of the kind," said Phil. "The bears and other animals have not all gone into their winter quarters yet, and we must have a grand hunt and get enough meat to supply all our wants."

This plan was considered a good one, particularly as their food was well-nigh exhausted, and early the next day all hands, with the exception of Maynard, who remained behind to take care of Mollie, set out upon the expedition.

Phil led the party toward the little bay where he had formerly had the terrible experience with the giants, hoping that he might fall in with some seals or walrus.

When they reached the shore, what was his delight to find at least fifty seals disporting upon the ice and in the water, utterly unconscious of danger.

At first they seemed inclined to be frightened, and several plunged into the water, but finally, seeing that they suffered no molestation from the new-comer, they ceased to pay him any attention whatever.

Walking boldly forward, therefore, Phil presently came upon one of the animals in a sequestered nook, quite out of sight of the rest, and the lad poising his harpoon, took good aim, and was about to pierce the creature's heart, when it looked at him with such a human expression that he was almost persuaded to spare its life.

"Pshaw!" he murmured. "It is his life or mine, so why do I hesitate? We must have food and furs or we shall die. I must not hesitate."

Then he plunged the keen harpoon into the creature's vitals, and in a moment the poor animal turned over upon its side and expired with scarcely a struggle.

In the meantime, Charlie and Hudson had each killed an animal apiece without exciting any commotion, and in a few moments Diggs killed his first and Phil his second seal.

The work thus proceeded until, the animals being finally frightened and taking to the water, they found they had killed twenty-three of them.

Dragging the smaller carcasses into one spot, the hunters produced their knives and proceeded first to take off the skins of the animals, a work which occupied about an hour.

When the work was all complete it was nearly dark, and as the snow had now begun to fall very heavily, they looked around for a place to spend the night.

They dug a hole in the snow under the lee of a ledge of ice, and burrowing deep into it, covered their faces with their fur hoods, and, nestling close to one another, allowed the snow to drift all over them.

Snugly packed away under the snow, therefore, our friends passed the night in perfect safety, the white covering falling thick and heavy over them as they slept, utterly oblivious to thoughts of danger or privation.

CHAPTER XXI.

BRACKETT AND SLOPER AT HOME—THE ACCUSING VOICE.

"So we didn't gain much on them fellows after all, Saul!"

"Not much, though we put 'em to a good deal of bother."

Weeks had passed since the destruction of the wreck, and during that time Brackett and Sloper had lived together in a cave discovered by Sloper, wherein was deposited a miscellaneous collection of stores of all kinds, got together by the enterprising Saul during his residence in these desolate regions.

The long Arctic night had set in, and eternal darkness prevailed.

Many a wrecked vessel had combined to furnish the storehouse of Saul Sloper with everything he wanted, and in more cases than one life had been sacrificed that he might obtain these comforts.

He was now deprived of the protection formerly given him by the natives, and he had made up his mind to move somewhere else, but whether it was his intention to go back to New Bedford or not Brackett could not determine.

At least he could not do so from his words, although he inferred from the scoundrel's manner that such was really his intention.

"He wants to fool me," thought Brackett, "but he can't do it for a cent. I'm up to all his dodges."

As the two sat there enjoying themselves, Brackett suddenly said, coming to business at once:

"Saul, is it to be a divvy on that racket?"

"What racket?"

"Gettin' them papers to Toby Coddington and claiming the reward."

"I ain't got no papers," replied Saul in drawling tones.

"You're a liar!"

This was too much for the slow-going Yankee, and he leaped to his feet in an instant.

"Take that back, Bill Brackett, or I'll ram it down yer ugly throat!" he roared.

"Shan't do it. Ye've got them papers, and I'm goin' to have 'em. I offered ye good terms, and ye wouldn't take 'em, and now I'm going to have 'em whether you will or not."

"We'll see about that. You called me a liar, and that's what I won't stand from no one."

"You won't?"

"No."

Then, drawing an ugly looking knife from his breast, Saul sprang forward with an evil look in his fishy eyes.

They had never seemed capable of expression before, but now they glowed with deadly hatred.

There was murder in them, and well might Bill spring up and move back a pace.

Then his arm quickly went to his side, and his hand caught an inner pocket.

He quickly drew forth something which glistened in the firelight, and then there was a quick flash and a puff of smoke.

Crack!

That sound could be nothing other than the report of a pistol, but it sounded strange in that obscure place.

"My God! I'm shot!" groaned Sloper, clapping his hand to his side.

He put his hand convulsively to his heart and fell at half length upon the floor.

"Will you give me them papers now?" demanded the murderer.

"No; I haven't got—— For God's sake, don't shoot again. I tell you I haven't——"

Then he fell forward upon his face.

Bill had long prepared himself for a scene like this, and now it had come.

Holding the clumsy weapon, still smoking, in his hand, he gazed for a moment upon the lifeless body before him, and then, overcome by the terror which the sight caused him, dropped the pistol, uttered a cry of horror and fled from the dreadful place.

Out into the night and the storm he hurried, caring naught for fierce winds or the blinding snow, every shriek of the gale seeming to say:

"Murderer!"

Now it was whispered, now uttered in groans, now shrieked, now thundered at him:

"Murderer!"

He heard but one word, saw it staring him in the face from the midst of the storm, from the icy cliffs, at his feet, everywhere:

"Murderer!"

Whither he might turn he still saw the word shining before him in blazing letters which seemed to burn into his very soul.

He hurried on and on, never caring where he went, and hours passed, during which time he never once paused in his wild flight.

He did not notice until he had come in sight of it that he had come upon the cave again, having been journeying in a circle.

He did not notice also that a man had just come out of it, but a few moments before, and now lay hidden behind a mound of ice.

Seeing the entrance of the cave before him, he suddenly remembered something, and dashed inside.

The body of the dead man lay just where it had fallen, and did not appear to have been in the least disturbed.

"Now, for the papers," muttered Bill, and kneeling down by the side of the body, he thrust his hand into a side pocket, where he expected that the documents were to be found.

They were not there!

CHAPTER XXII.

A FRUITLESS SEARCH.

In his excitement Bill Brackett forgot all about the accusing voice of the night before, and the sight of the dead body awakened no qualms of conscience.

He wanted the papers, and thought only of them, and was determined to get them at whatever cost.

He searched all the dead man's pockets and every nook and cranny of the cave, but with no success; he could find them nowhere.

Suddenly a new thought seemed to strike him, and he looked around as if searching for something, not the papers, but something else just as important.

"Where the mischief is that pistol?" he muttered. "I flung it down here after I had settled him last night."

It was nowhere to be found, and thinking that he might possibly have left it outside, he went out, first lighting a torch to help him in his search, and began to look for the missing article.

The first thing he saw was the mark of a footprint, other than his own, in the snow.

He followed the footprints out into the snow, muttering to himself occasionally as some new discovery was made.

He had suddenly seen something which caused him to break short off in his mutterings and utter a surprised exclamation.

What he had seen was a small round hole in the snow just a little ahead of the impression of the left foot.

In an instant the truth flashed across the man's mind.

"It's Peggs and his wooden leg," he muttered. "That little spike on the bottom makes these holes. Yes, and, by gosh! here's where the peg has sunk in deeper and the hole is bigger."

Some terrible thought must have crossed him, for his brow was as black as night, and his hands were clutched together nervously, as though he would have strangled some one.

"I've got it!" he hissed. "Peggs has been in there, and finding that pistol knows what has happened, and is keeping it to use against me."

Then another thought, more terrible than this, arose and Bill grasped his head in both hands as he shrieked:

"He's got those papers!"

* * * * *

"I'm just as sure that Bill Brackett killed that 'ere feller as I am of anything."

"But were they not friends?"

"They appeared to be, I must admit; but nevertheless and notwithstanding, I do firmly believe that Bill Brackett, second mate of the ship Harpoon, did, of premeditation and malice aforethought, kill the said Saul Sloper, formerly of the ship North Star—and that reminds me—"

"But what could have been his motive?"

"I give it up. I never was good at answerin' conundrums, and this one clean lays me out. By the way, that reminds me—"

"Hallo!" cried a voice. "Within there! Where are you, and how can you be got at?"

"Hallo!" cried Phil, in return. "Who and what are you?"

"Americans! The remnant of an exploring party. Give us shelter, for the love of Heaven!"

"No one appeals in that name in vain," cried Phil, and in an instant he had dashed outside, followed by Charlie and Hudson.

He was met by a party of half a dozen whites and two Esquimaux, the only surviving members, as they told him, of the crew of an exploring vessel, who had gone to discover the North Pole, but had found, like too many others, naught but privation, misery and death.

"What is your vessel?" asked Phil.

"The Aurora Borealis. I am George Shaw, commander of the expedition, formerly a lieutenant in the United States Navy. This is my chief officer, Lieutenant Harkins; my surgeon, Edward T. Clement; my chief engineer, Isaac S. Hazen, and my chief of meteorologists, Gilbert W. Vandevere," pointing in succession to each man as he spoke his name.

"How long since you were wrecked?"

"Three months. We were nipped by the ice, and for some time drifted with the floe. Then we were obliged to abandon our vessel and take to the boats, hoping to find land.

"Fortunately we have provisions enough, but what we lack is adequate shelter. Have you room enough to accommodate us?"

"We have barely enough for ourselves; but not far from here is a natural cavern inhabited by one man, who, I doubt not, will take you in."

"Why do you not go there?" asked Lieutenant Shaw, and Phil told him the reason, giving a brief but graphic account of all their adventures since the wreck.

"One of my comrades will show you the place," said Phil; "but you had better remain with us for a little while."

In the afternoon Peggs agreed to accompany the party to the cavern, and they accordingly set out; but when half the distance had been traversed, Peggs, who was somewhat in advance, came suddenly upon Brackett himself in a defiant attitude.

"Where are those papers you took from my cave?" demanded Brackett.

"I never took no papers from your cave, you villain. What did you kill Sloper for?"

"He attacked me, and I killed him in self-defense."

"That's a lie, and you know it. You murdered him."

Four shots, in rapid succession, rang out upon the stillness, and Peter Peggs fell flat upon the ice.

Not dead, however, or even wounded, for that treacherous leg of his had again thrown him down, thus saving his life by a hair's breadth.

The bullets flew over him and two of them struck Lieutenant Shaw, stretching him dead at the feet of his comrades, who, alarmed by this sudden and perfectly unaccountable attack, now rushed up to avenge the death of their commander.

Bill, seeing the force that was arrayed against him, dis-

charged the remaining chambers at random among the newcomers, and then fled at full speed toward the cavern.

CHAPTER XXIII.

VENGEANCE OVERTAKES THE EVIL-DOER—HOW THE WINTER WAS PASSED—WHAT HAPPENED IN NEW BEDFORD—CONCLUSION.

"So the villain is dead at last?"

"Yes, dead as a herrin', and you might as well move, bag and baggage, into the cavern."

It was Phil who had asked the question, Peggs being the other party to the conversation.

"How did it happen?"

"Well, you see, just as Bill raised that weapon of his, one just like that I found in the cavern, I made a rush at him, tripped, and fell flat on the ice.

"The bullets whistled over me; two of 'em struck Lieutenant Shaw and killed him, and the others whistled by and didn't do no damage.

"The other fellows come bouncing up, and Bill fired at 'em, and then dusted for dear life, with that hull party in full chase.

"The Esquimaux was the swiftest, in spite o' their short legs, and one of 'em chucked his spear full tilt at Mr. Bill, and caught him in the back."

"Did it kill him?"

"No; it only fitched him to his knees, but before he could get up the other Esquimaux feller had reached him.

"And when the white men got there, not a single spark o' life was left in the villain's body.

"The place is comfortable?"

"You bet it is; and that reminds—"

"You left the party there?"

"Yes, and there's room for all of us, and you'd better pack up and move right away."

All but Maynard and his daughter and Phil went over to the cavern, the latter remaining behind until better weather should set in, which happened in another fortnight.

March went out, April came in, and was succeeded by May before the party deemed it wise to leave their winter quarters and attempt the homeward march.

In the meantime, however, the boats had been drawn into the cavern and repaired; sledges were built, upon which they could be borne over the rough ice, and many other preparations made for the eventual departure.

The time for departure at last came, and our friends started for home, trusting to reach it at last, in spite of the dangers which beset them.

Many and many were the weary hundreds of miles which the party journeyed over, and more than once fate seemed utterly against them.

All but two of the exploring party died, one of these being an Esquimaux, and poor Hudson, who had acted so bravely during all the terrible adventures our friends had met with, shared the same fate.

Maynard, too, was never destined to see his home again, for he fell down a crevasse and was lost, being crushed by the ice, his body remaining forever in its icy grave.

We will pass rapidly over these sad events, and record at last the safe arrival in Upper Canada of the survivors.

From here they made their way to the coast, being given every assistance, both by people they met and by the government, and finally reaching New Bedford.

It was a great day for that sober old town when the news was received, and visitors fairly thronged upon the adventurers.

Old Toby Coddington was in a fever of excitement, however, for he had heard that Brackett was dead and Phil alive, and he feared that the man might have betrayed him to the lad.

Worse than that was in store for the old villain, for at the very time of Phil's return a strange case of a remarkable cure of insanity was recorded in the papers.

The man was Phil Gleason's father, and the identical person whom Toby Coddington had hired Saul Sloper to kill in order that he might get hold of those papers.

The man, whose name was Nat Gleason, had once, in a fit of generosity, made over all his property to a female relative of Coddington's, provided Phil died before he came of age.

And now it came out that he was Phil Gleason's father, and worth more than a million, his property having been accumulating all this time, being kept until Phil should come of age, as per an agreement already made by his bankers with the man in case of his sudden death or disappearance.

And now all this was known, the only things necessary to the full restoration of Phil to his rights being the production of certain papers, being a part of that very packet that Toby Coddington had sold his soul to obtain, and which were still missing.

Where were they?

Where do you suppose?

In the upper part of Peter Peggs' wooden leg.

At least, that is where they were for many years, but previous to his going upon this last voyage he had left them with his lawyer, with instructions to keep them until he called for them.

The man had given them to Peter to keep, without telling him what they were, and soon afterward Peter went away, not returning until a year after the other had disappeared.

Peter supposed he had gone off somewhere, and lugged those papers around in his leg, as being the only safe place, for four years, giving them at last, however, into safer hands.

Peter did not know that Phil was the son of his old friend, and did not even know that he had been reported dead until this remarkable story suddenly came out, and the man appeared in person and demanded his property.

Then Toby Coddington suddenly left New Bedford, to pursue his nefarious calling in parts unknown, and under an assumed name.

Then, too, Phil was declared to be the possessor of immense wealth, which he had fallen heir to upon his twenty-first birthday, which also happened at this time among the many events which suddenly came thronging upon each other in such bewildering succession.

Then he was married, and now he is settled down, and my story is virtually ended.

THE END.

Read "THE YELLOW DIAMOND; OR, GROPING IN THE DARK," by Jas. C. Merritt, which will be the next number (161) of "Pluck and Luck."

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